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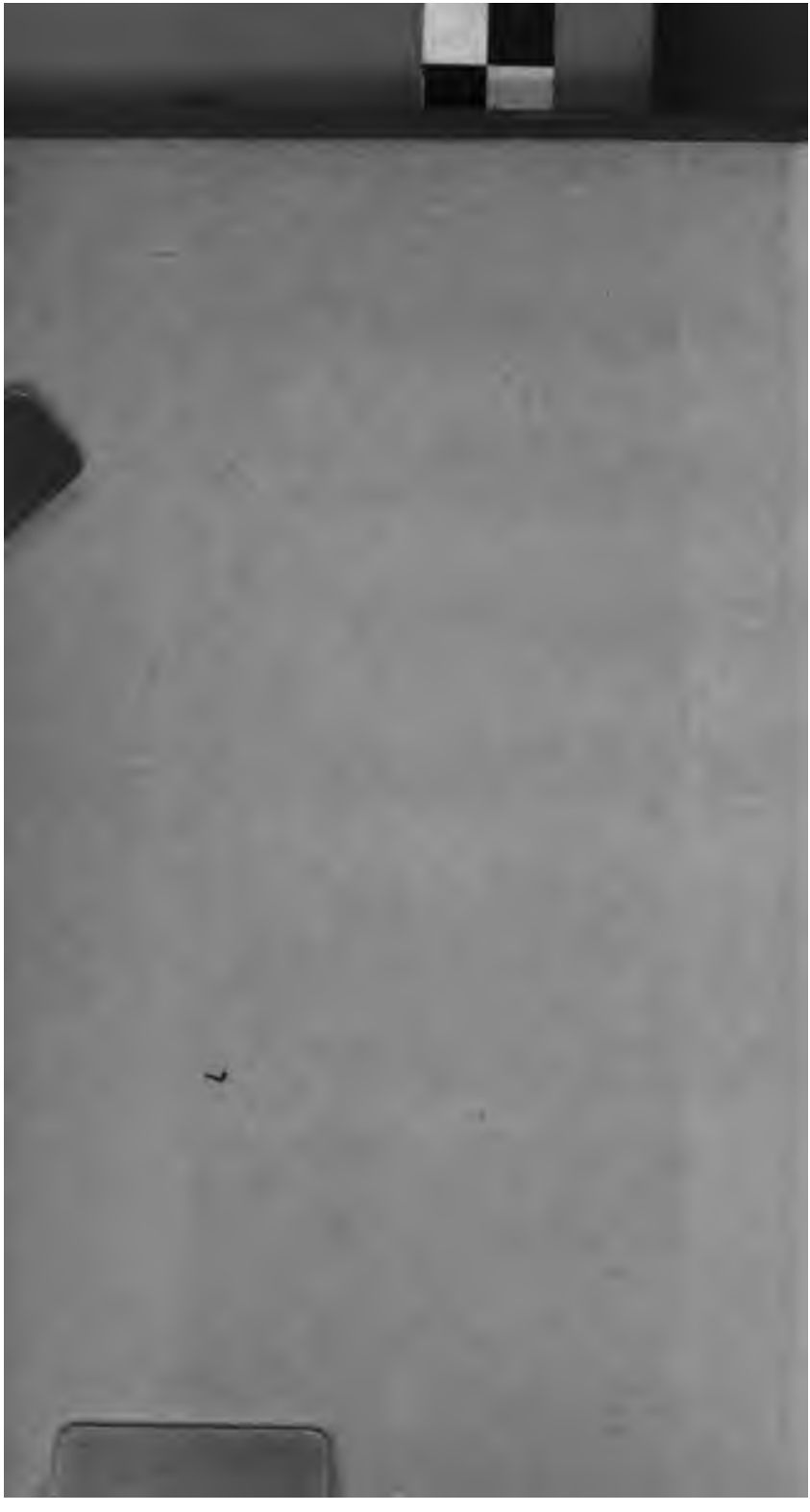

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BRET HARTE

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Stories of California and the Frontier
II

IN THE CARQUINEZ WOODS

AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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STORIES OF CALIFORNIA AND THE FRONTIER. II

IN THE CARQUINEZ WOODS

CHAPTER I

THE sun was going down on the Carquinez Woods. The few shafts of sunlight that had pierced their pillared gloom were lost in unfathomable depths, or splintered their ineffectual lances on the enormous trunks of the redwoods. For a time the dull red of their vast columns, and the dull red of their cast-off bark which matted the echoless aisles, still seemed to hold a faint glow of the dying day. But even this soon passed. Light and color fled upwards. The dark, interlaced treetops, that had all day made an impenetrable shade, broke into fire here and there; their lost spires glittered, faded, and went utterly out. A weird twilight that did not come from an outer world, but seemed born of the wood itself, slowly filled and possessed the aisles. The straight, tall, colossal trunks rose dimly like columns of upward smoke. The few fallen trees stretched their huge length into obscurity, and seemed to lie on shadowy trestles. The strange breath that filled these mysterious vaults had neither coldness nor moisture; a dry, fragrant dust arose from the noiseless foot that trod their bark-strewn floor: the aisles might have been tombs; the fallen trees, enormous mummies; the silence, the solitude of the forgotten past.

And yet this silence was presently broken by a recurring

sound like breathing, interrupted occasionally by inarticulate and stertorous gasps. It was not the quick, panting, listening breath of some stealthy feline or canine animal, but indicated a larger, slower, and more powerful organization, whose progress was less watchful and guarded, or as if a fragment of one of the fallen monsters had become animate. At times this life seemed to take visible form, but as vaguely, as misshapenly, as the phantom of a nightmare. Now it was a square object moving sideways, endways, with neither head nor tail and scarcely visible feet; then an arched bulk rolling against the trunks of the trees and recoiling again, or an upright cylindrical mass, but always oscillating and unsteady, and striking the trees on either hand. The frequent occurrence of the movement suggested the figures of some weird rhythmic dance to music heard by the shape alone. Suddenly it either became motionless or faded away. There was the frightened neighing of a horse, the sudden jingling of spurs, a shout and outcry, and the swift apparition of three dancing torches in one of the dark aisles; but so intense was the obscurity that they shed no light on surrounding objects, and seemed to advance at their own volition without human guidance, until they disappeared suddenly behind the interposing bulk of one of the largest trees. Beyond its eighty feet of circumference the light could not reach, and the gloom remained inscrutable. But the voices and jingling spurs were heard distinctly.

"Blast the mare! She's shied off that cursed trail again."

"Ye ain't lost it agin, hev ye?" growled a second voice.

"That's jist what I hev. And these blasted pine knots don't give light an inch beyond 'em. D—d if I don't think they make this cursed hole blacker."

There was a laugh — a woman's laugh — hysterical, bitter, sarcastic, exasperating. The second speaker, without heeding it, went on: —

"What in thunder skeert the hosses? Did you see or hear anything?"

"Nothin'. The wood is like a graveyard."

The woman's voice again broke into a hoarse, contemptuous laugh. The man resumed angrily: —

"If you know anything, why in h—ll don't you say so, instead of cackling like a d—d squaw there? P'r'aps you reckon you ken find the trail too."

"Take this rope off my wrist," said the woman's voice, "untie my hands, let me down, and I'll find it." She spoke quickly and with a Spanish accent.

It was the men's turn to laugh. "And give you a show to snatch that six-shooter and blow a hole through me, as you did to the Sheriff of Calaveras, eh? Not if this court understands itself," said the first speaker dryly.

"Go to the devil, then," she said curtly.

"Not before a lady," responded the other. There was another laugh from the men, the spurs jingled again, the three torches reappeared from behind the tree, and then passed away in the darkness.

For a time silence and immutability possessed the woods; the great trunks loomed upwards, their fallen brothers stretched their slow length into obscurity. The sound of breathing again became audible; the shape reappeared in the aisle, and recommenced its mystic dance. Presently it was lost in the shadow of the largest tree, and to the sound of breathing succeeded a grating and scratching of bark. Suddenly, as if riven by lightning, a flash broke from the centre of the tree-trunk, lit up the woods, and a sharp report rang through it. After a pause the jingling of spurs and the dancing of torches were revived from the distance.

"Hallo?"

No answer.

"Who fired that shot?"

But there was no reply. A slight veil of smoke passed

away to the right, there was the spice of gunpowder in the air, but nothing more.

The torches came forward again, but this time it could be seen they were held in the hands of two men and a woman. The woman's hands were tied at the wrist to the horse-hair reins of her mule, while a riata, passed around her waist and under the mule's girth, was held by one of the men, who were both armed with rifles and revolvers. Their frightened horses curveted, and it was with difficulty they could be made to advance.

"Ho! stranger, what are you shooting at?"

The woman laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. "Look yonder at the roots of the tree. You're a d—d smart man for a sheriff, ain't you?"

The man uttered an exclamation and spurred his horse forward, but the animal reared in terror. He then sprang to the ground and approached the tree. The shape lay there, a scarcely distinguishable bulk.

"A grizzly, by the living Jingo! Shot through the heart."

It was true. The strange shape lit up by the flaring torches seemed more vague, unearthly, and awkward in its dying throes, yet the small shut eyes, the feeble nose, the ponderous shoulders, and half-human foot armed with powerful claws were unmistakable. The men turned by a common impulse and peered into the remote recesses of the wood again.

"Hi, mister! come and pick up your game. Hallo there!" The challenge fell unheeded on the empty woods.

"And yet," said he whom the woman had called the sheriff, "he can't be far off. It was a close shot, and the bear hez dropped in his tracks. Why, wot's this sticking in his claws?"

The two men bent over the animal. "Why, it's sugar, brown sugar — look!" There was no mistake. The huge

beast's fore paws and muzzle were streaked with the unromantic household provision, and heightened the absurd contrast of its incongruous members. The woman, apparently indifferent, had taken that opportunity to partly free one of her wrists.

"If we had n't been cavorting round this yer spot for the last half-hour, I 'd swear there was a shanty not a hundred yards away," said the sheriff. The other man, without replying, remounted his horse instantly.

"If there is, and it 's inhabited by a gentleman that kin make centre shots like that in the dark, and don't care to explain how, I reckon I won't disturb him."

The sheriff was apparently of the same opinion, for he followed his companion's example, and once more led the way. The spurs tinkled, the torches danced, and the cavalcade slowly reëntered the gloom. In another moment it had disappeared.

The wood sank again into repose, this time disturbed by neither shape nor sound. What lower forms of life might have crept close to its roots were hidden in the ferns, or passed with deadened tread over the bark-strewn floor. Towards morning a coolness like dew fell from above, with here and there a dropping twig or nut, or the crepitant awakening and stretching-out of cramped and weary branches. Later a dull, lurid dawn, not unlike the last evening's sunset, filled the aisles. This faded again, and a clear gray light, in which every object stood out in sharp distinctness, took its place. Morning was waiting outside in all its brilliant, youthful coloring, but only entered as the matured and sobered day.

Seen in that stronger light, the monstrous tree near which the dead bear lay revealed its age in its denuded and scarred trunk, and showed in its base a deep cavity, a foot or two from the ground, partly hidden by hanging strips of bark which had fallen across it. Suddenly one

of these strips was pushed aside, and a young man leaped lightly down.

But for the rifle he carried and some modern peculiarities of dress, he was of a grace so unusual and unconventional that he might have passed for a faun who was quitting his ancestral home. He stepped to the side of the bear with a light elastic movement that was as unlike customary progression as his face and figure were unlike the ordinary types of humanity. Even as he leaned upon his rifle, looking down at the prostrate animal, he unconsciously fell into an attitude that in any other mortal would have been a pose, but with him was the picturesque and unstudied relaxation of perfect symmetry.

"Hallo, mister!"

He raised his head so carelessly and listlessly that he did not otherwise change his attitude. Stepping from behind the tree, the woman of the preceding night stood before him. Her hands were free except for a thong of the riata, which was still knotted around one wrist, the end of the thong having been torn or burnt away. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her hair hung over her shoulders in one long black braid.

"I reckoned all along it was *you* who shot the bear," she said; "at least some one hidin' yer," and she indicated the hollow tree with her hand. "It was n't no chance shot." Observing that the young man, either from misconception or indifference, did not seem to comprehend her, she added, "We came by here last night, a minute after you fired."

"Oh, that was *you* kicked up such a row, was it?" said the young man, with a shade of interest.

"I reckon," said the woman, nodding her head, "and them that was with me."

"And who are they?"

"Sheriff Dunn, of Yolo, and his deputy."

"And where are they now?"

"The deputy — in h—ll, I reckon. I don't know about the sheriff."

"I see," said the young man quietly; "and you?"

"I — got away," she said savagely. But she was taken with a sudden nervous shiver, which she at once repressed by tightly dragging her shawl over her shoulders and elbows, and folding her arms defiantly.

"And you're going?"

"To follow the deputy, maybe," she said gloomily. "But come, I say, ain't you going to treat? It's cursed cold here."

"Wait a moment." The young man was looking at her, with his arched brows slightly knit and a half smile of curiosity. "Ain't you Teresa?"

She was prepared for the question, but evidently was not certain whether she would reply defiantly or confidently. After an exhaustive scrutiny of his face she chose the latter, and said, "You can bet your life on it, Johnny."

"I don't bet, and my name is n't Johnny. Then you're the woman who stabbed Dick Curson over at Lagrange's?"

She became defiant again. "That's me, all the time. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. And you used to dance at the Alhambra?"

She whisked the shawl from her shoulders, held it up like a scarf, and made one or two steps of the *sembicuacua*. There was not the least gayety, recklessness, or spontaneity in the action; it was simply mechanical bravado. It was so ineffective, even upon her own feelings, that her arms presently dropped to her side, and she coughed embarrassedly. "Where's that whiskey, pardner?" she asked.

The young man turned toward the tree he had just

quitted, and without further words assisted her to mount to the cavity. It was an irregular-shaped vaulted chamber, pierced fifty feet above by a shaft or cylindrical opening in the decayed trunk, which was blackened by smoke as if it had served the purpose of a chimney. In one corner lay a bearskin and blanket; at the side were two alcoves or indentations, one of which was evidently used as a table, and the other as a cupboard. In another hollow, near the entrance, lay a few small sacks of flour, coffee, and sugar, the sticky contents of the latter still strewing the floor. From this storehouse the young man drew a wicker flask of whiskey, and handed it, with a tin cup of water, to the woman. She waved the cup aside, placed the flask to her lips, and drank the undiluted spirit. Yet even this was evidently bravado, for the water started to her eyes, and she could not restrain the paroxysm of coughing that followed.

"I reckon that 's the kind that kills at forty rods," she said, with an hysterical laugh. "But I say, pardner, you look as if you were fixed here to stay," and she stared ostentatiously around the chamber. But she had already taken in its minutest details, even to observing that the hanging strips of bark could be disposed so as to completely hide the entrance.

"Well, yes," he replied; "it would n't be very easy to pull up the stakes and move the shanty further on."

Seeing that either from indifference or caution he had not accepted her meaning, she looked at him fixedly, and said,—

"What is your little game?"

"Eh?"

"What are you hiding for — here in this tree?"

"But I 'm not hiding."

"Then why did n't you come out when they hailed you last night?"

"Because I did n't care to."

Teresa whistled incredulously. "All right — then if you're not hiding, I'm going to." As he did not reply, she went on: "If I can keep out of sight for a couple of weeks, this thing will blow over here, and I can get across into Yolo. I could get a fair show there, where the boys know me. Just now the trails are all watched, but no one would think of lookin' here."

"Then how did you come to think of it?" he asked carelessly.

"Because I knew that bear had n't gone far for that sugar; because I knew he had n't stole it from a cache — it was too fresh, and we 'd have seen the torn-up earth; because we had passed no camp; and because I knew there was no shanty here. And, besides," she added in a low voice, "maybe I was huntin' a hole myself to die in — and spotted it by instinct."

There was something in this suggestion of a hunted animal that, unlike anything she had previously said or suggested, was not exaggerated, and caused the young man to look at her again. She was standing under the chimney-like opening, and the light from above illuminated her head and shoulders. The pupils of her eyes had lost their feverish prominence, and were slightly suffused and softened as she gazed abstractedly before her. The only vestige of her previous excitement was in her left-hand fingers, which were incessantly twisting and turning a diamond ring upon her right hand, but without imparting the least animation to her rigid attitude. Suddenly, as if conscious of his scrutiny, she stepped aside out of the revealing light, and by a swift feminine instinct raised her hand to her head as if to adjust her straggling hair. It was only for a moment, however, for, as if aware of the weakness, she struggled to resume her aggressive pose.

"Well," she said, "speak up. Am I goin' to stop here, or have I got to get up and get?"

"You can stay," said the young man quietly; "but as I've got my provisions and ammunition here, and haven't any other place to go to just now, I suppose we 'll have to share it together."

She glanced at him under her eyelids, and a half-bitter, half-contemptuous smile passed across her face. "All right, old man," she said, holding out her hand, "it 's a go. We 'll start in housekeeping at once, if you like."

"I 'll have to come here once or twice a day," he said, quite composedly, "to look after my things, and get something to eat; but I 'll be away most of the time, and what with camping out under the trees every night I reckon my share won't incommode you."

She opened her black eyes upon him, at this original proposition. Then she looked down at her torn dress. "I suppose this style of thing ain't very fancy, is it?" she said, with a forced laugh.

"I think I know where to beg or borrow a change for you, if you can't get any," he replied simply.

She stared at him again. "Are you a family man?"

"No."

She was silent for a moment. "Well," she said, "you can tell your girl I 'm not particular about its being in the latest fashion."

There was a slight flush on his forehead as he turned toward the little cupboard, but no tremor in his voice as he went on: "You 'll find tea and coffee here, and, if you 're bored, there 's a book or two. You read, don't you — I mean English?"

She nodded, but cast a look of undisguised contempt upon the two worn, coverless novels he held out to her. "You haven't got last week's 'Sacramento Union,' have you? I hear they have my case all in; only them lying reporters made it out against me all the time."

"I don't see the papers," he replied curtly.

"They say there's a picture of me in the 'Police Gazette,' taken in the act," and she laughed.

He looked a little abstracted, and turned as if to go. "I think you'll do well to rest a while just now, and keep as close hid as possible until afternoon. The trail is a mile away at the nearest point, but some one might miss it and stray over here. You're quite safe if you're careful, and stand by the tree. You can build a fire here," he stepped under the chimney-like opening, "without its being noticed. Even the smoke is lost and cannot be seen so high."

The light from above was falling on his head and shoulders, as it had on hers. She looked at him intently.

"You travel a good deal on your figure, pardner, don't you?" she said, with a certain admiration that was quite sexless in its quality; "but I don't see how you pick up a living by it in the Carquinez Woods. So you're going, are you? You might be more sociable. Good-by."

"Good-by!" He leaped from the opening.

"I say, pardner!"

He turned, a little impatiently. She had knelt down at the entrance, so as to be nearer his level, and was holding out her hand. But he did not notice it, and she quietly withdrew it.

"If anybody dropped in and asked for you, what name will they say?"

He smiled. "Don't wait to hear."

"But suppose *I* wanted to sing out for you, what will I call you?"

He hesitated. "Call me — Lo."

"Lo, the poor Indian?" [1]

"Exactly."

It suddenly occurred to the woman, Teresa, that in the young man's height, supple yet erect carriage, color, and

[1] The first word of Pope's familiar apostrophe is humorously used in the far West as a distinguishing title for the Indian.

singular gravity of demeanor there was a refined aboriginal suggestion. He did not look like any Indian she had ever seen, but rather as a youthful chief might have looked. There was a further suggestion in his fringed buckskin shirt and moccasins; but before she could utter the half-sarcastic comment that rose to her lips he had glided noiselessly away, even as an Indian might have done.

She readjusted the slips of hanging bark with feminine ingenuity, dispersing them so as to completely hide the entrance. Yet this did not darken the chamber, which seemed to draw a purer and more vigorous light through the soaring shaft that pierced the room than that which came from the dim woodland aisles below. Nevertheless, she shivered, and drawing her shawl closely around her began to collect some half-burnt fragments of wood in the chimney to make a fire. But the preoccupation of her thoughts rendered this a tedious process, as she would from time to time stop in the middle of an action and fall into an attitude of rapt abstraction, with far-off eyes and rigid mouth. When she had at last succeeded in kindling a fire and raising a film of pale blue smoke, that seemed to fade and dissipate entirely before it reached the top of the chimney shaft, she crouched beside it, fixed her eyes on the darkest corner of the cavern, and became motionless.

What did she see through that shadow?

Nothing at first but a confused medley of figures and incidents of the preceding night; things to be put away and forgotten; things that would not have happened but for another thing — the thing before which everything faded! A ball-room; the sounds of music; the one man she had cared for insulting her with the flaunting ostentation of his unfaithfulness; herself despised, put aside, laughed at, or worse, jilted. And then the moment of delirium, when the light danced; the one wild act that lifted her, the despised one, above them all — made her

the supreme figure, to be glanced at by frightened women, stared at by half-startled, half-admiring men! "Yes," she laughed; but struck by the sound of her own voice, moved twice round the cavern nervously, and then dropped again into her old position.

As they carried him away he had laughed at her — like a hound that he was; he who had praised her for her spirit, and incited her revenge against others; he who had taught her to strike when she was insulted; and it was only fit he should reap what he had sown. She was what he, what other men, had made her. And what was she now? What had she been once?

She tried to recall her childhood: the man and woman who might have been her father and mother; who fought and wrangled over her precocious little life; abused or caressed her as she sided with either; and then left her with a circus troupe, where she first tasted the power of her courage, her beauty, and her recklessness. She remembered those flashes of triumph that left a fever in her veins — a fever that when it failed must be stimulated by dissipation, by anything, by everything that would keep her name a wonder in men's mouths, an envious fear to women. She recalled her transfer to the strolling players; her cheap pleasures, and cheaper rivalries and hatred — but always Teresa! the daring Teresa! the reckless Teresa! audacious as a woman, invincible as a boy; dancing, flirting, fencing, shooting, swearing, drinking, smoking, fighting Teresa! "Oh, yes; she had been loved, perhaps — who knows? — but always feared. Why should she change now? Ha! he should see."

She had lashed herself in a frenzy, as was her wont, with gestures, ejaculations, oaths, adjurations, and passionate apostrophes, but with this strange and unexpected result. Heretofore she had always been sustained and kept up by an audience of some kind or quality, if only

perhaps a humble companion; there had always been some one she could fascinate or horrify, and she could read her power mirrored in their eyes. Even the half-abstracted indifference of her strange host had been something. But she was alone now. Her words fell on apathetic solitude; she was acting to viewless space. She rushed to the opening, dashed the hanging bark aside, and leaped to the ground.

She ran forward wildly a few steps, and stopped.

"Hallo!" she cried. "Look, 't is I, Teresa!"

The profound silence remained unbroken. Her shrillest tones were lost in an echoless space, even as the smoke of her fire had faded into pure ether. She stretched out her clenched fists as if to defy the pillared austerities of the vaults around her.

"Come and take me if you dare!"

The challenge was unheeded. If she had thrown herself violently against the nearest tree-trunk, she could not have been stricken more breathless than she was by the compact, embattled solitude that encompassed her. The hopelessness of impressing these cold and passive vaults with her selfish passion filled her with a vague fear. In her rage of the previous night she had not seen the wood in its profound immobility. Left alone with the majesty of those enormous columns, she trembled and turned faint. The silence of the hollow tree she had just quitted seemed to her less awful than the crushing presence of these mute and monstrous witnesses of her weakness. Like a wounded quail, with lowered crest and trailing wing, she crept back to her hiding-place.

Even then the influence of the wood was still upon her. She picked up the novel she had contemptuously thrown aside, only to let it fall again in utter weariness. For a moment her feminine curiosity was excited by the discovery of an old book, in whose blank leaves were pressed a

variety of flowers and woodland grasses. As she could not conceive that these had been kept for any but a sentimental purpose, she was disappointed to find that underneath each was a sentence in an unknown tongue, that even to her untutored eye did not appear to be the language of passion. Fnally she rearranged the couch of skins and blankets, and, imparting to it in three clever shakes an entirely different character, lay down to pursue her reveries. But nature asserted herself, and ere she knew it she was fast asleep.

So intense and prolonged had been her previous excitement that, the tension once relieved, she passed into a slumber of exhaustion so deep that she seemed scarce to breathe. High noon succeeded morning, the central shaft received a single ray of upper sunlight, the afternoon came and went, the shadows gathered below, the sunset fires began to eat their way through the groined roof, and she still slept. She slept even when the bark hangings of the chamber were put aside, and the young man reëntered.

He laid down a bundle he was carrying, and softly approached the sleeper. For a moment he was startled from his indifference — she lay so still and motionless. But this was not all that struck him: the face before him was no longer the passionate, haggard visage that confronted him that morning; the feverish air, the burning color, the strained muscles of mouth and brow, and the staring eyes were gone; wiped away, perhaps, by the tears that still left their traces on cheek and dark eyelash. It was a face of a handsome woman of thirty, with even a suggestion of softness in the contour of the cheek and arching of her upper lip, no longer rigidly drawn down in anger, but relaxed by sleep on her white teeth.

With the lithe, soft tread that was habitual to him, the young man moved about, examining the condition of the little chamber and its stock of provisions and necessaries,

and withdrew presently, to reappear as noiselessly with a tin bucket of water. This done he replenished the little pile of fuel with an armful of bark and pine cones, cast an approving glance about him, which included the sleeper, and silently departed.

It was night when she awoke. She was surrounded by a profound darkness, except where the shaft-like opening made a nebulous mist in the corner in her wooden cavern. Providentially she struggled back to consciousness slowly, so that the solitude and silence came upon her gradually, with a growing realization of the events of the past twenty-four hours, but without a shock. She was alone here, but safe still, and every hour added to her chances of ultimate escape. She remembered to have seen a candle among the articles on the shelf, and she began to grope her way toward the matches. Suddenly she stopped. What was that panting?

Was it her own breathing, quickened with a sudden nameless terror? or was there something outside? Her heart seemed to stop beating while she listened. Yes! it was a panting outside — a panting now increased, multiplied, redoubled, mixed with the sounds of rustling, tearing, craunching, and occasionally a quick, impatient snarl. She crept on her hands and knees to the opening and looked out. At first the ground seemed to be undulating between her and the opposite tree. But a second glance showed her the black and gray, bristling, tossing backs of tumbling beasts of prey, charging the carcass of the bear that lay at its roots, or contesting for the prize with gluttonous choked breath, sidelong snarls, arched spines, and recurved tails. One of the boldest had leaped upon a buttressing root of her tree within a foot of the opening. The excitement, awe, and terror she had undergone culminated in one wild, maddened scream, that seemed to pierce even the cold depths of the forest, as she dropped on her face, with her hands clasped over her eyes in an agony of fear.

Her scream was answered, after a pause, by a sudden volley of firebrands and sparks into the midst of the panting, crowding pack; a few smothered howls and snaps, and a sudden dispersion of the concourse. In another moment the young man, with a blazing brand in either hand, leaped upon the body of the bear.

Teresa raised her head, uttered a hysterical cry, slid down the tree, flew wildly to his side, caught convulsively at his sleeve, and fell on her knees beside him.

"Save me! save me!" she gasped, in a voice broken by terror. "Save me from those hideous creatures. No, no!" she implored, as he endeavored to lift her to her feet. "No — let me stay here close beside you. So," clutching the fringe of his leather hunting-shirt, and dragging herself on her knees nearer him — "so — don't leave me, for God's sake!"

"They are gone," he replied, gazing down curiously at her, as she wound the fringe around her hand to strengthen her hold; "they 're only a lot of cowardly coyotes and wolves, that dare not attack anything that lives and can move."

The young woman responded with a nervous shudder. "Yes, that 's it," she whispered, in a broken voice; "it 's only the dead they want. Promise me — swear to me, if I 'm caught, or hung, or shot, you won't let me be left here to be torn and — ah! my God! what 's that?"

She had thrown her arms around his knees, completely pinioning him to her frantic breast. Something like a smile of disdain passed across his face as he answered, "It 's nothing. They will not return. Get up!"

Even in her terror she saw the change in his face. "I know, I know!" she cried. "I 'm frightened — but I cannot bear it any longer. Hear me! Listen! Listen — but don't move! I did n't mean to kill Curson — no! I swear to God, no! I did n't mean to kill the sheriff —

and I did n't. I was only bragging — do you hear? I lied! I lied — don't move, I swear to God I lied. I 've made myself out worse than I was. I have. Only don't leave me now — and if I die — and it 's not far off, maybe — get me away from here — and from *them*. Swear it!"

"All right," said the young man, with a scarcely concealed movement of irritation. "But get up now, and go back to the cabin."

"No; not *there* alone." Nevertheless, he quietly but firmly released himself.

"I will stay here," he replied. "I would have been nearer to you, but I thought it better for your safety that my camp-fire should be further off. But I can build it here, and that will keep the coyotes off."

"Let me stay with you — beside you," she said imploringly.

She looked so broken, crushed, and spiritless, so unlike the woman of the morning that, albeit with an ill grace, he tacitly consented, and turned away to bring his blankets. But in the next moment she was at his side, following him like a dog, silent and wistful, and even offering to carry his burden. When he had built the fire, for which she had collected the pine cones and broken branches near them, he sat down, folded his arms, and leaned back against the tree in reserved and deliberate silence. Humble and submissive, she did not attempt to break in upon a reverie she could not help but feel had little kindliness to herself. As the fire snapped and sparkled, she pillowed her head upon a root, and lay still to watch it.

It rose and fell, and dying away at times to a mere lurid glow; and again, agitated by some breath scarcely perceptible to them, quickening into a roaring flame. When only the embers remained, a dead silence filled the wood. Then the first breath of morning moved the tangled canopy above,

and a dozen tiny sprays and needles detached from the interlocked boughs winged their soft way noiselessly to the earth. A few fell upon the prostrate woman like a gentle benediction, and she slept. But even then, the young man, looking down, saw that the slender fingers were still aimlessly but rigidly twisted in the leather fringe of his hunting-shirt.

CHAPTER II

It was a peculiarity of the Carquinez Woods that it stood apart and distinct in its gigantic individuality. Even where the integrity of its own singular species was not entirely preserved, it admitted no inferior trees. Nor was there any diminishing fringe on its outskirts; the sentinels that guarded the few gateways of the dim trails were as monstrous as the serried ranks drawn up in the heart of the forest. Consequently, the red highway that skirted the eastern angle was bare and shadeless, until it slipped a league off into a watered valley and refreshed itself under lesser sycamores and willows. It was here the newly born city of Excelsior, still in its cradle, had, like an infant Hercules, strangled the serpentine North Fork of the American river, and turned its life-current into the ditches and flumes of the Excelsior miners.

Newest of the new houses that seemed to have accidentally formed its single, straggling street was the residence of the Rev. Winslow Wynn, not unfrequently known as "Father Wynn," pastor of the first Baptist church. The "pastorage," as it was cheerfully called, had the glaring distinction of being built of brick, and was, as had been wickedly pointed out by idle scoffers, the only "fireproof" structure in town. This sarcasm was not, however, supposed to be particularly distasteful to "Father Wynn," who enjoyed the reputation of being "hail fellow, well met" with the rough mining element, who called them by their Christian names, had been known to drink at the bar of the Polka Saloon while engaged in the conversion of a

prominent citizen, and was popularly said to have no "gospel starch" about him. Certain conscious outcasts and transgressors were touched at this apparent unbending of the spiritual authority. The rigid tenets of Father Wynn's faith were lost in the supposed catholicity of his humanity. "A preacher that can jine a man when he 's histin' liquor into him, without jawin' about it, ought to be allowed to wrestle with sinners and splash about in as much cold water as he likes," was the criticism of one of his converts. Nevertheless, it was true that Father Wynn was somewhat loud and intolerant in his tolerance. It was true that he was a little more rough, a little more frank, a little more hearty, a little more impulsive, than his disciples. It was true that often the proclamation of his extreme liberality and brotherly equality partook somewhat of an apology. It is true that a few who might have been most benefited by this kind of gospel regarded him with a singular disdain. It is true that his liberality was of an ornamental, insinuating quality, accompanied with but little sacrifice; his acceptance of a collection taken up in a gambling-saloon for the rebuilding of his church, destroyed by fire, gave him a popularity large enough, it must be confessed, to cover the sins of the gamblers themselves, but it was not proven that *he* had ever organized any form of relief. But it was true that local history somehow accepted him as an exponent of mining Christianity, without the least reference to the opinions of the Christian miners themselves.

The Rev. Mr. Wynn's liberal habits and opinions were not, however, shared by his only daughter, a motherless young lady of eighteen. Nellie Wynn was in the eye of Excelsior an unapproachable divinity, as inaccessible and cold as her father was impulsive and familiar. An atmosphere of chaste and proud virginity made itself felt even in the starched integrity of her spotless skirts, in her neatly gloved finger-tips, in her clear amber eyes, in her

imperious red lips, in her sensitive nostrils. Need it be said that the youth and middle age of Excelsior were madly, because apparently hopelessly, in love with her? For the rest, she had been expensively educated, was profoundly ignorant in two languages, with a trained misunderstanding of music and painting, and a natural and faultless taste in dress.

The Rev. Mr. Wynn was engaged in a characteristic hearty parting with one of his latest converts upon his own doorstep, with admirable *al fresco* effect. He had just clapped him on the shoulder. "Good-by, good-by, Charley, my boy, and keep in the right path; not up, or down, or round the gulch, you know — ha, ha! — but straight across lots to the shining gate." He had raised his voice under the stimulus of a few admiring spectators, and backed his convert playfully against the wall. "You see! we're goin' in to win, you bet. Good-by! I'd ask you to step in and have a chat, but I've got my work to do, and so have you. The gospel must n't keep us from that, must it, Charley? Ha, ha!"

The convert (who elsewhere was a profane expressman, and had become quite imbecile under Mr. Wynn's active heartiness and brotherly horse-play before spectators) managed, however, to feebly stammer with a blush something about "Miss Nellie."

"Ah, Nellie. She, too, is at her tasks — trimming her lamp — you know, the parable of the wise virgins," continued Father Wynn hastily, fearing that the convert might take the illustration literally. "There, there — good-by. Keep in the right path." And with a parting shove he dismissed Charley, and entered his own house.

That "wise virgin," Nellie, had evidently finished with the lamp, and was now going out to meet the bridegroom, as she was fully dressed and gloved, and had a pink parasol in her hand, as her father entered the sitting-room.

His bluff heartiness seemed to fade away as he removed his soft, broad-brimmed hat and glanced across the too fresh-looking apartment. There was a smell of mortar still in the air, and a faint suggestion that at any moment green grass might appear between the interstices of the red-brick hearth. The room, yielding a little in the point of coldness, seemed to share Miss Nellie's fresh virginity, and, barring the pink parasol, set her off as in a vestal's cell.

"I supposed you would n't care to see Brace, the expressman, so I got rid of him at the door," said her father, drawing one of the new chairs towards him slowly, and sitting down carefully, as if it were a hitherto untried experiment.

Miss Nellie's face took a tint of interest. "Then he does n't go with the coach to Indian Spring to-day?"

"No; why?"

"I thought of going over myself to get the Burnham girls to come to choir-meeting," replied Miss Nellie carelessly, "and he might have been company."

"He 'd go now if he knew you were going," said her father; "but it 's just as well he should n't be needlessly encouraged. I rather think that Sheriff Dunn is a little jealous of him. By the way, the sheriff is much better. I called to cheer him up to-day" (Mr. Wynn had in fact tumultuously accelerated the sick man's pulse), "and he talked of you, as usual. In fact, he said he had only two things to get well for. One was to catch and hang that woman Teresa, who shot him; the other — can't you guess the other?" he added archly, with a faint suggestion of his other manner.

Miss Nellie coldly could not.

The Rev. Mr. Wynn's archness vanished. "Don't be a fool," he said dryly. "He wants to marry you, and you know it."

"Most of the men here do," responded Miss Nellie, with-

out the least trace of coquetry. "Is the wedding or the hanging to take place first, or together, so he can officiate at both?"

"His share in the Union Ditch is worth a hundred thousand dollars," continued her father; "and if he is n't nominated for district judge this fall, he 's bound to go to the legislature, anyway. I don't think a girl with your advantages and education can afford to throw away the chance of shining in Sacramento, San Francisco, or, in good time, perhaps even Washington."

Miss Nellie's eyes did not reflect entire disapproval of this suggestion, although she replied with something of her father's practical quality.

"Mr. Dunn is not out of his bed yet, and they say Teresa 's got away to Arizona, so there is n't any particular hurry."

"Perhaps not; but see here, Nellie, I 've some important news for you. You know your young friend of the Carquinez Woods — Dorman, the botanist, eh? Well, Brace knows all about him. And what do you think he is?"

Miss Nellie took upon herself a few extra degrees of cold, and did n't know.

"An Injin! Yes, an out-and-out Cherokee. You see he calls himself Dorman — Low Dorman. That 's only French for 'Sleeping Water,' his Injin name — 'Low Dorman.'"

"You mean 'L'Eau Dormante,'" said Nellie.

"That 's what I said. The chief called him 'Sleeping Water' when he was a boy, and one of them French Canadian trappers translated it into French when he brought him to California to school. But he 's an Injin, sure. No wonder he prefers to live in the woods."

"Well?" said Nellie.

"Well," echoed her father impatiently, "he 's an Injin,

I tell you, and you can't of course have anything to do with him. He must n't come here again."

"But you forget," said Nellie imperturbably, "that it was you who invited him here, and were so much exercised over him. You remember you introduced him to the bishop and those Eastern clergymen as a magnificent specimen of a young Californian. You forget what an occasion you made of his coming to church on Sunday, and how you made him come in his buckskin shirt and walk down the street with you after service!"

"Yes, yes," said the Rev. Mr. Wynn hurriedly.

"And," continued Nellie carelessly, "how you made us sing out of the same book 'Children of our Father's Fold,' and how you preached at him until he actually got a color!"

"Yes," said her father; "but it was n't known then he was an Injin, and they are frightfully unpopular with those Southwestern men among whom we labor. Indeed, I am quite convinced that when Brace said 'the only good Indian was a dead one' his expression, though extravagant, perhaps, really voiced the sentiments of the majority. It would be only kindness to the unfortunate creature to warn him from exposing himself to their rude but conscientious antagonism."

"Perhaps you 'd better tell him, then, in your own popular way, which they all seem to understand so well," responded the daughter. Mr. Wynn cast a quick glance at her, but there was no trace of irony in her face — nothing but a half-bored indifference as she walked toward the window.

"I will go with you to the coach-office," said her father, who generally gave these simple paternal duties the pronounced character of a public Christian example.

"It 's hardly worth while," replied Miss Nellie. "I 've to stop at the Watsons', at the foot of the hill, and ask

after the baby; so I shall go on to the Crossing and pick up the coach as it passes. Good-by."

Nevertheless, as soon as Nellie had departed, the Rev. Mr. Wynn proceeded to the coach-office, and publicly grasping the hand of Yuba Bill, the driver, commended his daughter to his care in the name of the universal brotherhood of man and the Christian fraternity. Carried away by his heartiness, he forgot his previous caution, and confided to the expressman Miss Nellie's regrets that she was not to have that gentleman's company. The result was that Miss Nellie found the coach with its passengers awaiting her with uplifted hats and wreathed smiles at the Crossing, and the box-seat (from which an unfortunate stranger, who had expensively paid for it, had been summarily ejected) at her service, beside Yuba Bill, who had thrown away his cigar and donned a new pair of buckskin gloves to do her honor. But a more serious result to the young beauty was the effect of the Rev. Mr. Wynn's confidences upon the impulsive heart of Jack Brace, the expressman. It has been already intimated that it was his "day off." Unable to summarily reassume his usual functions beside the driver without some practical reason, and ashamed to go so palpably as a mere passenger, he was forced to let the coach proceed without him. Discomfited for the moment, he was not, however, beaten. He had lost the blissful journey by her side, which would have been his professional right, but — she was going to Indian Spring! could he not anticipate her there? Might they not meet in the most accidental manner? And what might not come from that meeting away from the prying eyes of their own town? Mr. Brace did not hesitate, but saddling his fleet Buckskin, by the time the stage-coach had passed the Crossing in the highroad he had mounted the hill and was dashing along the "cut-off" in the same direction, a full mile in advance. Arriving at Indian

Spring, he left his horse at a Mexican posada on the confines of the settlement, and from the piled débris of a tunnel excavation awaited the slow arrival of the coach. On mature reflection he could give no reason why he had not boldly awaited it at the express-office, except a certain bashful consciousness of his own folly, and a belief that it might be glaringly apparent to the bystanders. When the coach arrived and he had overcome this consciousness, it was too late. Yuba Bill had discharged his passengers for Indian Spring, and driven away. Miss Nellie was in the settlement, but where? As time passed he became more desperate and bolder. He walked recklessly up and down the main street, glancing in at the open doors of shops, and even in the windows of private dwellings. It might have seemed a poor compliment to Miss Nellie, but it was an evidence of his complete preoccupation, when the sight of a female face at a window, even though it was plain or perhaps painted, caused his heart to bound, or the glancing of a skirt in the distance quickened his feet and his pulses. Had Jack contented himself with remaining at Excelsior he might have vaguely regretted, but as soon become as vaguely accustomed to, Miss Nellie's absence. But it was not until his hitherto quiet and passive love took this first step of action that it fully declared itself. When he had made the tour of the town a dozen times unsuccessfully, he had perfectly made up his mind that marriage with Nellie or the speedy death of several people, including possibly himself, was the only alternative. He regretted he had not accompanied her; he regretted he had not demanded where she was going; he contemplated a course of future action that two hours ago would have filled him with bashful terror. There was clearly but one thing to do, — to declare his passion the instant he met her, and return with her to Excelsior an accepted suitor, or not to return at all.

Suddenly he was vexatiously conscious of hearing his name lazily called, and looking up found that he was on the outskirts of the town, and interrogated by two horsemen.

"Got down to walk, and the coach got away from you, Jack, eh?"

A little ashamed of his preoccupation, Brace stammered something about "collections." He did not recognize the men, but his own face, name, and business were familiar to everybody for fifty miles along the stage-road.

"Well, you can settle a bet for us, I reckon. Bill Dacre thar bet me five dollars and the drinks that a young gal we met at the edge of the Carquinez Woods, dressed in a long brown duster and half-muffled up in a hood, was the daughter of Father Wynn of Excelsior. I did not get a fair look at her, but it stands to reason that a high-toned young lady like Nellie Wynn don't go trap'sing along the wood like a Pike County tramp. I took the bet. May be you know if she's here or in Excelsior?"

Mr. Brace felt himself turning pale with eagerness and excitement. But the near prospect of seeing her presently gave him back his caution, and he answered truthfully that he had left her in Excelsior, and that in his two hours' sojourn in Indian Spring he had not once met her. "But," he added, with a Californian's reverence for the sanctity of a bet, "I reckon you'd better make it a stand-off for twenty-four hours, and I'll find out and let you know;" which, it is only fair to say, he honestly intended to do.

With a hurried nod of parting, he continued in the direction of the woods. When he had satisfied himself that the strangers had entered the settlement and would not follow him for further explanation, he quickened his pace. In half an hour he passed between two of the gigantic sentinels that guarded the entrance to a trail.

Here he paused to collect his thoughts. The woods were vast in extent, the trail dim and uncertain — at times apparently breaking off, or intersecting another trail as faint as itself. Believing that Miss Nellie had diverged from the highway only as a momentary excursion into the shade, and that she would not dare to penetrate its more sombre and unknown recesses, he kept within sight of the skirting plain. By degrees the sedate influence of the silent vaults seemed to depress him. The ardor of the chase began to flag. Under the calm of their dim roof the fever of his veins began to subside; his pace slackened; he reasoned more deliberately. It was by no means probable that the young woman in a brown duster was Nellie; it was not her habitual traveling-dress; it was not like her to walk unattended in the road; there was nothing in her tastes and habits to take her into this gloomy forest, allowing that she had even entered it; and on this absolute question of her identity the two witnesses were divided. He stopped irresolutely, and cast a last, long, half-despairing look around him. Hitherto he had given that part of the wood nearest the plain his greatest attention. His glance now sought its darker recesses. Suddenly he became breathless. Was it a beam of sunlight that had pierced the groined roof above, and now rested against the trunk of one of the dimmer, more secluded giants? No, it was moving; even as he gazed it slipped away, glanced against another tree, passed across one of the vaulted aisles, and then was lost again. Brief as was the glimpse, he was not mistaken — it was the figure of a woman.

In another moment he was on her track, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing her reappear at a lesser distance. But the continual intervention of the massive trunks made the chase by no means an easy one, and as he could not keep her always in sight he was unable to follow or under-

stand the one intelligent direction which she seemed to invariably keep. Nevertheless, he gained upon her breathlessly, and, thanks to the bark-strewn floor, noiselessly. He was near enough to distinguish and recognize the dress she wore, a pale yellow, that he had admired when he first saw her. It was Nellie, unmistakably; if it were she of the brown duster, she had discarded it, perhaps for greater freedom. He was near enough to call out now, but a sudden nervous timidity overcame him; his lips grew dry. What should he say to her? How account for his presence? "Miss Nellie, one moment!" he gasped. She darted forward and — vanished.

At this moment he was not more than a dozen yards from her. He rushed to where she had been standing, but her disappearance was perfect and complete. He made a circuit of the group of trees within whose radius she had last appeared, but there was neither trace of her, nor suggestion of her mode of escape. He called aloud to her; the vacant woods let his helpless voice die in their unresponsive depths. He gazed into the air and down at the bark-strewn carpet at his feet. Like most of his vocation, he was sparing of speech, and epigrammatic after his fashion. Comprehending in one swift but despairing flash of intelligence the existence of some fateful power beyond his own weak endeavor, he accepted its logical result with characteristic grimness, threw his hat upon the ground, put his hands in his pockets, and said, —

"Well, I'm d—d!"

CHAPTER III

Out of compliment to Miss Nellie Wynn, Yuba Bill, on reaching Indian Spring, had made a slight détour to enable him to ostentatiously set down his fair passenger before the door of the Burnhams. When it had closed on the admiring eyes of the passengers and the coach had rattled away, Miss Nellie, without any undue haste or apparent change in her usual quiet demeanor, managed, however, to dispatch her business promptly, and, leaving an impression that she would call again before her return to Excelsior, parted from her friends, and slipped away through a side street to the General Furnishing Store of Indian Spring. In passing this emporium, Miss Nellie's quick eye had discovered a cheap brown linen duster hanging in its window. To purchase it, and put it over her delicate cambric dress, albeit with a shivering sense that she looked like a badly folded brown paper parcel, did not take long. As she left the shop it was with mixed emotions of chagrin and security that she noticed that her passage through the settlement no longer turned the heads of its male inhabitants. She reached the outskirts of Indian Spring and the highroad at about the time Mr. Brace had begun his fruitless patrol of the main street. Far in the distance a faint olive-green table mountain seemed to rise abruptly from the plain. It was the Carquinez Woods. Gathering her spotless skirts beneath her extemporized brown domino, she set out briskly towards them.

But her progress was scarcely free or exhilarating. She was not accustomed to walking in a country where "buggy-

riding" was considered the only genteel young-lady-like mode of progression, and its regular provision the expected courtesy of mankind. Always fastidiously booted, her low-quartered shoes were charming to the eye, but hardly adapted to the dust and inequalities of the highroad. It was true that she had thought of buying a coarser pair at Indian Spring, but once face to face with their uncompromising ugliness, she had faltered and fled. The sun was unmistakably hot, but her parasol was too well known and offered too violent a contrast to the duster for practical use. Once she stopped with an exclamation of annoyance, hesitated, and looked back. In half an hour she had twice lost her shoe and her temper; a pink flush took possession of her cheeks, and her eyes were bright with suppressed rage. Dust began to form grimy circles around their orbits; with cat-like shivers she even felt it pervade the roots of her blonde hair. Gradually her breath grew more rapid and hysterical, her smarting eyes became humid, and at last, encountering two observant horsemen in the road, she turned and fled, until, reaching the wood, she began to cry.

Nevertheless she waited for the two horsemen to pass, to satisfy herself that she was not followed; then pushed on vaguely, until she reached a fallen tree, where, with a gesture of disgust, she tore off her hapless duster and flung it on the ground. She then sat down sobbing, but after a moment dried her eyes hurriedly and started to her feet. A few paces distant, erect, noiseless, with outstretched hand, the young solitary of the Carquinez Woods advanced towards her. His hand had almost touched hers, when he stopped.

"What has happened?" he asked gravely.

"Nothing," she said, turning half away, and searching the ground with her eyes as if she had lost something. "Only I must be going back now."

"You shall go back at once, if you wish it," he said, flushing slightly. "But you have been crying; why?"

Frank as Miss Nellie wished to be, she could not bring herself to say that her feet hurt her, and the dust and heat were ruining her complexion. It was therefore with a half-confident belief that her troubles were really of a moral quality that she answered, "Nothing — nothing, but — but — it's wrong to come here."

"But you did not think it was wrong when you agreed to come, at our last meeting," said the young man, with that persistent logic which exasperates the inconsequent feminine mind. "It cannot be any more wrong to-day."

"But it was not so far off," murmured the young girl, without looking up.

"Oh, the distance makes it more improper, then," he said abstractedly; but after a moment's contemplation of her half-averted face, he asked gravely, "Has any one talked to you about me?"

Ten minutes before, Nellie had been burning to unburden herself of her father's warning, but now she felt she would not. "I wish you would n't call yourself Low," she said at last.

"But it's my name," he replied quietly.

"Nonsense! It's only a stupid translation of a stupid nickname. They might as well call you 'Water' at once."

"But you said you liked it."

"Well, so I do. But don't you see — I — oh dear! you don't understand."

Low did not reply, but turned his head with resigned gravity towards the deeper woods. Grasping the barrel of his rifle with his left hand, he threw his right arm across his left wrist and leaned slightly upon it with the habitual ease of a Western hunter — doubly picturesque in his own lithe, youthful symmetry. Miss Nellie looked at him from under her eyelids, and then half defiantly raised her head and her dark lashes. Gradually an almost magical change came over her features; her eyes grew larger and more and

more yearning, until they seemed to draw and absorb in their liquid depths the figure of the young man before her; her cold face broke into an ecstasy of light and color; her humid lips parted in a bright, welcoming smile, until, with an irresistible impulse, she arose, and throwing back her head stretched towards him two hands full of vague and trembling passion.

In another moment he had seized them, kissed them, and, as he drew her closer to his embrace, felt them tighten around his neck. "But what name do you wish to call me?" he asked, looking down into her eyes.

Miss Nellie murmured something confidentially to the third button of his hunting-shirt. "But that," he replied, with a faint smile, "*that* would n't be any more practical, and you would n't want others to call me dar—" Her fingers loosened around his neck, she drew her head back, and a singular expression passed over her face, which to any calmer observer than a lover would have seemed, however, to indicate more curiosity than jealousy.

"Who else *does* call you so?" she added earnestly. "How many, for instance?"

Low's reply was addressed not to her ear, but her lips. She did not avoid it, but added, "And do you kiss them all like that?" Taking him by the shoulders, she held him a little way from her, and gazed at him from head to foot. Then drawing him again to her embrace, she said, "I don't care; at least no woman has kissed you like that." Happy, dazzled, and embarrassed, he was beginning to stammer the truthful protestation that rose to his lips, but she stopped him: "No, don't protest! say nothing! Let *me* love *you* — that is all. It is enough." He would have caught her in his arms again, but she drew back. "We are near the road," she said quietly. "Come! you promised to show me where you camped. Let us make the most of our holiday. In an hour I must leave the woods."

"But I shall accompany you, dearest."

"No, I must go as I came — alone."

"But Nellie" —

"I tell you no," she said, with an almost harsh practical decision, incompatible with her previous abandonment. "We might be seen together."

"Well, suppose we are; we must be seen together eventually," he remonstrated.

The young girl made an involuntary gesture of impatient negation, but checked herself. "Don't let us talk of that now. Come, while I am here under your own roof" — she pointed to the high interlaced boughs above them — "you must be hospitable. Show me your home; tell me, is n't it a little gloomy sometimes?"

"It never has been; I never thought it *would* be until the moment you leave it to-day."

She pressed his hand briefly and in a half-perfunctory way, as if her vanity had accepted and dismissed the compliment. "Take me somewhere," she said inquisitively, "where you stay most; I do not seem to see you *here*," she added, looking around her with a slight shiver. "It is so big and so high. Have you no place where you eat and rest and sleep?"

"Except in the rainy season, I camp all over the place — at any spot where I may have been shooting or collecting."

"Collecting?" queried Nellie.

"Yes; with the herbarium, you know."

"Yes," said Nellie dubiously. "But you told me once — the first time we ever talked together," she added, looking in his eyes — "something about your keeping your things like a squirrel in a tree. Could we not go there? Is there not room for us to sit and talk without being browbeaten and looked down upon by these supercilious trees?"

"It 's too far away," said Low truthfully, but with a

somewhat pronounced emphasis, "much too far for you just now; and it lies on another trail that enters the wood beyond. But come, I will show you a spring known only to myself, the wood ducks, and the squirrels. I discovered it the first day I saw you, and gave it your name. But you shall christen it yourself. It will be all yours, and yours alone, for it is so hidden and secluded that I defy any feet but my own, or whoso shall keep step with mine, to find it. Shall that foot be yours, Nellie?"

Her face beamed with a bright assent. "It may be difficult to track it from here," he said, "but stand where you are a moment, and don't move, rustle, nor agitate the air in any way. The woods are still now." He turned at right angles with the trail, moved a few paces into the ferns and underbrush, and then stopped with his finger on his lips. For an instant both remained motionless; then, with his intent face bent forward and both arms extended, he began to sink slowly upon one knee and one side, inclining his body with a gentle, perfectly graduated movement until his ear almost touched the ground. Nellie watched his graceful figure breathlessly, until, like a bow unbent, he stood suddenly erect again, and beckoned to her without changing the direction of his face.

"What is it?" she asked eagerly.

"All right; I have found it," he continued, moving forward without turning his head.

"But how? What did you kneel for?" He did not reply, but taking her hand in his, continued to move slowly on through the underbrush, as if obeying some magnetic attraction. "How did you find it?" again asked the half-awed girl, her voice unconsciously falling to a whisper. Still silent, Low kept his rigid face and forward tread for twenty yards further; then he stopped and released the girl's half-impatient hand. "How did you find it?" she repeated sharply.

"With my ears and nose," replied Low gravely.

"With your nose?"

"Yes; I smelt it."

Still fresh with the memory of his picturesque attitude, the young man's reply seemed to involve something more irritating to her feelings than even that absurd anti-climax. She looked at him coldly and critically, and appeared to hesitate whether to proceed. "Is it far?" she asked.

"Not more than ten minutes now, as I shall go."

"And you won't have to smell your way again?"

"No; it is quite plain now," he answered seriously, the young girl's sarcasm slipping harmlessly from his Indian stolidity. "Don't you smell it yourself?"

But Miss Nellie's thin, cold nostrils refused to take that vulgar interest.

"Nor hear it? Listen!"

"You forget I suffer the misfortune of having been brought up under a roof," she replied coldly.

"That 's true," repeated Low, in all seriousness; "it 's not your fault. But do you know, I sometimes think I am peculiarly sensitive to water; I feel it miles away. At night, though I may not see it or even know where it is, I am conscious of it. It is company to me when I am alone, and I seem to hear it in my dreams. There is no music as sweet to me as its song. When you sang with me that day in church, I seemed to hear it ripple in your voice. It says to me more than the birds do, more than the rarest plants I find. It seems to live with me and for me. It is my earliest recollection; I know it will be my last, for I shall die in its embrace. Do you think, Nellie," he continued, stopping short and gazing earnestly in her face — "do you think that the chiefs knew this when they called me 'Sleeping Water'?"

To Miss Nellie's several gifts I fear the gods had not added poetry. A slight knowledge of English verse of a

select character, unfortunately, did not assist her in the interpretation of the young man's speech, nor relieve her from the momentary feeling that he was at times deficient in intellect. She preferred, however, to take a personal view of the question, and expressed her sarcastic regret that she had not known before that she had been indebted to the great flume and ditch at Excelsior for the pleasure of his acquaintance. This pert remark occasioned some explanation, which ended in the girl's accepting a kiss in lieu of more logical argument. Nevertheless, she was still conscious of an inward irritation — always distinct from her singular and perfectly material passion — which found vent as the difficulties of their undeviating progress through the underbrush increased. At last she lost her shoe again, and stopped short. "It 's a pity your Indian friends did not christen you 'Wild Mustard' or 'Clover,'" she said satirically, "that you might have had some sympathies and longings for the open fields instead of these horrid jungles! I know we will not get back in time."

Unfortunately, Low accepted this speech literally and with his remorseless gravity. "If my name annoys you, I can get it changed by the legislature, you know, and I can find out what my father's name was, and take that. My mother, who died in giving me birth, was the daughter of a chief."

"Then your mother was really an Indian?" said Nellie, "and you are" — She stopped short.

"But I told you all this the day we first met," said Low, with grave astonishment. "Don't you remember our long talk coming from church?"

"No," said Nellie coldly, "you did n't tell me." But she was obliged to drop her eyes before the unwavering, undeniable truthfulness of his.

"You have forgotten," he said calmly; "but it is only right you should have your own way in disposing of a

name that I have cared little for; and as you 're to have a share of it " —

" Yes, but it 's getting late, and if we are not going forward " — interrupted the girl impatiently.

" We *are* going forward," said Low imperturbably; " but I wanted to tell you, as we were speaking on *that* subject " (Nellie looked at her watch), " I 've been offered the place of botanist and naturalist in Professor Grant's survey of Mount Shasta, and if I take it — why, when I come back, darling — well " —

" But you 're not going just yet," broke in Nellie, with a new expression in her face.

" No."

" Then we need not talk of it now," she said with animation.

Her sudden vivacity relieved him. " I see what 's the matter," he said gently, looking down at her feet, " these little shoes were not made to keep step with a moccasin. We must try another way." He stooped as if to secure the erring buskin, but suddenly lifted her like a child to his shoulder. " There," he continued, placing her arm around his neck, " you are clear of the ferns and brambles now, and we can go on. Are you comfortable ? " He looked up, read her answer in her burning eyes and the warm lips pressed to his forehead at the roots of his straight dark hair, and again moved onward as in a mesmeric dream. But he did not swerve from his direct course, and with a final dash through the undergrowth parted the leafy curtain before the spring.

At first the young girl was dazzled by the strong light that came from a rent in the interwoven arches of the wood. The breach had been caused by the huge bulk of one of the great giants that had half fallen, and was lying at a steep angle against one of its mightiest brethren, having borne down a lesser tree in the arc of its down-

ward path. Two of the roots, as large as younger trees, tossed their blackened and bare limbs high in the air. The spring — the insignificant cause of this vast disruption — gurgled, flashed, and sparkled at the base; the limpid baby fingers that had laid bare the foundations of that fallen column played with the still clinging rootlets, laved the fractured and twisted limbs, and, widening, filled with sleeping water the graves from which they had been torn.

"It had been going on for years, down there," said Low, pointing to a cavity from which the fresh water now slowly welled, "but it had been quickened by the rising of the subterranean springs and rivers which always occurs at a certain stage of the dry season. I remember that on that very night — for it happened a little after midnight, when all sounds are more audible — I was troubled and oppressed in my sleep by what you would call a nightmare; a feeling as if I was kept down by bonds and pinions that I longed to break. And then I heard a crash in this direction, and the first streak of morning brought me the sound and scent of water. Six months afterwards I chanced to find my way here, as I told you, and gave it your name. I did not dream that I should ever stand beside it with you, and have you christen it yourself."

He unloosed the cup from his flask, and filling it at the spring handed it to her. But the young girl leant over the pool, and pouring the water idly back said, "I 'd rather put my feet in it. May n't I?"

"I don't understand you," he said wonderingly.

"My feet are *so* hot and dusty. The water looks deliciously cool. May I?"

"Certainly."

He turned away as Nellie, with apparent unconsciousness, seated herself on the bank, and removed her shoes

and stockings. When she had dabbled her feet a few moments in the pool, she said over her shoulder, —

"We can talk just as well, can't we?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, why didn't you come to church more often, and why didn't you think of telling father that you were convicted of sin and wanted to be baptized?"

"I don't know," hesitated the young man.

"Well, you lost the chance of having father convert you, baptize you, and take you into full church fellowship."

"I never thought" — he began.

"You never thought. Aren't you a Christian?"

"I suppose so."

"He supposes so! Have you no convictions — no professions?"

"But, Nellie, I never thought that you" —

"Never thought that I — what? Do you think that I could ever be anything to a man who did not believe in justification by faith, or in the covenant of church fellowship? Do you think father would let me?"

In his eagerness to defend himself he stepped to her side. But seeing her little feet shining through the dark water, like outcroppings of delicately veined quartz, he stopped embarrassed. Miss Nellie, however, leaped to one foot, and, shaking the other over the pool, put her hand on his shoulder to steady herself. "You haven't got a towel — or," she said dubiously, looking at her small handkerchief, "anything to dry them on?"

But Low did not, as she perhaps expected, offer his own handkerchief.

"If you take a bath after our fashion," he said gravely, "you must learn to dry yourself after our fashion."

Lifting her again lightly in his arms, he carried her a few steps to the sunny opening, and bade her bury her

feet in the dried mosses and baked withered grasses that were bleaching in a hollow. The young girl uttered a cry of childish delight, as the soft ciliated fibres touched her sensitive skin.

"It is healing, too," continued Low; "a moccasin filled with it after a day on the trail makes you all right again."

But Miss Nellie seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Is that the way the squaws bathe and dry themselves?"

"I don't know; you forget I was a boy when I left them."

"And you 're sure you never knew any?"

"None."

The young girl seemed to derive some satisfaction in moving her feet up and down for several minutes among the grasses in the hollow; then, after a pause, said, "You are quite certain I am the first woman that ever touched this spring?"

"Not only the first woman, but the first human being, except myself."

"How nice!"

They had taken each other's hands; seated side by side, they leaned against a curving elastic root that half supported, half encompassed them. The girl's capricious, fitful manner succumbed as before to the near contact of her companion. Looking into her eyes, Low fell into a sweet, selfish lover's monologue, descriptive of his past and present feelings toward her, which she accepted with a heightened color, a slight exchange of sentiment, and a strange curiosity. The sun had painted their half-embraced silhouettes against the slanting tree-trunk, and began to decline unnoticed; the ripple of the water mingling with their whispers came as one sound to the

listening ear; even their eloquent silences were as deep, and, I wot, perhaps as dangerous as the darkened pool that filled so noiselessly a dozen yards away. So quiet were they that the tremor of invading wings once or twice shook the silence, or the quick scamper of frightened feet rustled the dead grass. But in the midst of a prolonged stillness the young man sprang up so suddenly that Nellie was still half clinging to his neck as he stood erect. "Hush!" he whispered; "some one is near!"

He disengaged her anxious hands gently, leaped upon the slanting tree-trunk, and running half way up its incline with the agility of a squirrel, stretched himself at full length upon it, and listened.

To the impatient, inexplicably startled girl, it seemed an age before he rejoined her.

"You are safe," he said; "he's going by the western trail toward Indian Spring."

"Who is *he?*" she asked, biting her lips with a poorly restrained gesture of mortification and disappointment.

"Some stranger," replied Low.

"As long as he was n't coming here, why did you give me such a fright?" she said pettishly. "Are you nervous because a single wayfarer happens to stray here?"

"It was no wayfarer, for he tried to keep near the trail," said Low. "He was a stranger to the wood, for he lost his way every now and then. He was seeking or expecting some one, for he stopped frequently and waited or listened. He had not walked far, for he wore spurs that tinkled and caught in the brush; and yet he had not ridden here, for no horse's hoofs passed the road since we have been here. He must have come from Indian Spring."

"And you heard all that when you listened just now?" asked Nellie half disdainfully.

Impervious to her incredulity, Low turned his calm eyes

on her face. "Certainly, I'll bet my life on what I say. Tell me; do you know anybody in Indian Spring who would likely spy upon you?"

The young girl was conscious of a certain ill-defined uneasiness, but answered, "No."

"Then it was not *you* he was seeking," said Low thoughtfully. Miss Nellie had not time to notice the emphasis, for he added, "You must go at once; and lest you have been followed I will show you another way back to Indian Spring. It is longer, and you must hasten. Take your shoes and stockings with you until we are out of the bush."

He raised her again in his arms and strode once more out through the covert into the dim aisles of the wood.

They spoke but little; she could not help feeling that some other discordant element, affecting him more strongly than it did her, had come between them, and was half perplexed and half frightened. At the end of ten minutes he seated her upon a fallen branch, and telling her he would return by the time she had resumed her shoes and stockings glided from her like a shadow. She would have uttered an indignant protest at being left alone, but he was gone ere she could detain him. For a moment she thought she hated him. But when she had mechanically shod herself once more, not without nervous shivers at every falling needle, he was at her side.

"Do you know any one who wears a frieze coat like that?" he asked, handing her a few torn shreds of wool affixed to a splinter of bark.

Miss Nellie instantly recognized the material of a certain sporting-coat worn by Mr. Jack Brace on festive occasions, but a strange yet infallible instinct that was part of her nature made her instantly disclaim all knowledge of it.

"No," she said.

"Not any one who scents himself with some doctor's

stuff like cologne?" continued Low, with the disgust of keen olfactory sensibilities.

Again Miss Nellie recognized the perfume with which the gallant expressman was wont to make redolent her little parlor, but again she avowed no knowledge of its possessor. "Well," returned Low, with some disappointment, "such a man has been here. Be on your guard. Let us go at once."

She required no urging to hasten her steps, but hurried breathlessly at his side. He had taken a new trail by which they left the wood at right angles with the highway, two miles away. Following an almost effaced mule track along a slight depression of the plain, deep enough, however, to hide them from view, he accompanied her, until, rising to the level again, she saw they were beginning to approach the highway and the distant roofs of Indian Spring. "Nobody meeting you now," he whispered, "would suspect where you had been. Good-night! until next week — remember."

They pressed each other's hands, and standing on the slight ridge outlined against the paling sky, in full view of the highway, parted carelessly, as if they had been chance-met travelers. But Nellie could not restrain a parting backward glance as she left the ridge. Low had descended to the deserted trail, and was running swiftly in the direction of the Carquinez Woods.

CHAPTER IV

TERESA awoke with a start. It was day already, but how far advanced the even, unchanging, soft twilight of the woods gave no indication. Her companion had vanished, and to her bewildered senses so had the camp-fire, even to its embers and ashes. Was she awake, or had she wandered away unconsciously in the night? One glance at the tree above her dissipated the fancy. There was the opening of her quaint retreat and the hanging strips of bark, and at the foot of the opposite tree lay the carcass of the bear. It had been skinned, and, as Teresa thought with an inward shiver, already looked half its former size.

Not yet accustomed to the fact that a few steps in either direction around the circumference of those great trunks produced the sudden appearance or disappearance of any figure, Teresa uttered a slight scream as her young companion unexpectedly stepped to her side. "You see a change here," he said; "the stamped-out ashes of the camp-fire lie under the brush," and he pointed to some cleverly scattered boughs and strips of bark which completely effaced the traces of last night's bivouac. "We can't afford to call the attention of any packer or hunter who might straggle this way to this particular spot and this particular tree; the more naturally," he added, "as they always prefer to camp over an old fire." Accepting this explanation meekly, as partly a reproach for her caprice of the previous night, Teresa hung her head.

"I'm very sorry," she said, "but would n't that," pointing to the carcass of the bear, "have made them curious?"

But Low's logic was relentless.

"By this time there would have been little left to excite curiosity if you had been willing to leave those beasts to their work."

"I 'm very sorry," repeated the woman, her lips quivering.

"They are the scavengers of the wood," he continued in a lighter tone; "if you stay here you must try to use them to keep your house clean."

Teresa smiled nervously.

"I mean that they shall finish their work to-night," he added, "and I shall build another camp-fire for us a mile from here until they do."

But Teresa caught his sleeve.

"No," she said hurriedly, "don't, please, for me. You must not take the trouble nor the risk. Hear me; do, please. I can bear it, I *will* bear it — to-night. I would have borne it last night, but it was so strange — and," she passed her hands over her forehead, "I think I must have been half mad. But I am not so foolish now."

She seemed so broken and despondent that he replied reassuringly: "Perhaps it would be better that I should find another hiding-place for you, until I can dispose of that carcass, so that it will not draw dogs after the wolves, and men after *them*. Besides, your friend the sheriff will probably remember the bear when he remembers anything, and try to get on its track again."

"He 's a conceited fool," broke in Teresa in a high voice, with a slight return of her old fury, "or he 'd have guessed where that shot came from; and," she added in a lower tone, looking down at her limp and nerveless fingers, "he would n't have let a poor, weak, nervous wretch like me get away."

"But his deputy may put two and two together, and connect your escape with it."

Teresa's eyes flashed. "It would be like the dog, just to save his pride, to swear it was an ambush of my friends, and that he was overpowered by numbers. Oh yes! I see it all!" she almost screamed, lashing herself into a rage at the bare contemplation of this diminution of her glory. "That 's the dirty lie he tells everywhere, and is telling now."

She stamped her feet and glanced savagely around, as if at any risk to proclaim the falsehood. Low turned his impassive, truthful face towards her.

"Sheriff Dunn," he began gravely, "is a politician, and a fool when he takes to the trail as a hunter of man or beast. But he is not a coward nor a liar. Your chances would be better if he were — if he laid your escape to an ambush of your friends, than if his pride held you alone responsible."

"If he 's such a good man, why do you hesitate?" she replied bitterly. "Why don't you give me up at once, and do a service to one of your friends?"

"I do not even know him," returned Low, opening his clear eyes upon her. "I 've promised to hide you here, and I shall hide you as well from him as from anybody."

Teresa did not reply, but suddenly dropping down upon the ground buried her face in her hands and began to sob convulsively. Low turned impassively away, and putting aside the bark curtain climbed into the hollow tree. In a few moments he reappeared, laden with provisions and a few simple cooking-utensils, and touched her lightly on the shoulder. She looked up timidly; the paroxysm had passed, but her lashes yet glittered.

"Come," he said, "come and get some breakfast. I find you have eaten nothing since you have been here — twenty-four hours."

"I did n't know it," she said, with a faint smile. Then seeing his burden, and possessed by a new and strange

desire for some menial employment, she said hurriedly, "Let me carry something — do, please," and even tried to disencumber him.

Half annoyed, Low at last yielded, and handing his rifle said, "There, then, take that; but be careful — it's loaded!"

A cruel blush burnt the woman's face to the roots of her hair as she took the weapon hesitatingly in her hand.

"No!" she stammered, hurriedly lifting her shame-suffused eyes to his; "no! no!"

He turned away with an impatience which showed her how completely gratuitous had been her agitation and its significance, and said, "Well, then give it back if you are afraid of it." But she as suddenly declined to return it; and shouldering it deftly, took her place by his side. Silently they moved from the hollow tree together.

During their walk she did not attempt to invade his taciturnity. Nevertheless she was as keenly alive and watchful of his every movement and gesture as if she had hung enchanted on his lips. The unerring way with which he pursued a viewless, undeviating path through those trackless woods, his quick reconnaissance of certain trees or openings, his mute inspection of some almost imperceptible footprint of bird or beast, his critical examination of certain plants which he plucked and deposited in his deerskin haversack, were not lost on the quick-witted woman. As they gradually changed the clear, unencumbered aisles of the central woods for a more tangled undergrowth, Teresa felt that subtle admiration which culminates in imitation, and simulating perfectly the step, tread, and easy swing of her companion, followed so accurately his lead that she won a gratified exclamation from him when their goal was reached — a broken, blackened shaft, splintered by long-forgotten lightning, in the centre of a tangled carpet of wood-clover.

"I don't wonder you distanced the deputy," he said cheerfully, throwing down his burden, "if you can take the hunting-path like that. In a few days, if you stay here, I can venture to trust you alone for a little pasear when you are tired of the tree."

Teresa looked pleased, but busied herself with arrangements for the breakfast, while he gathered the fuel for the roaring fire which soon blazed beside the shattered tree.

Teresa's breakfast was a success. It was a revelation to the young nomad, whose ascetic habits and simple tastes were usually content with the most primitive forms of frontier cookery. It was at least a surprise to him to know that without extra trouble kneaded flour, water, and saleratus need not be essentially heavy; that coffee need not be boiled with sugar to the consistency of syrup; that even that rarest delicacy, small shreds of venison covered with ashes and broiled upon the end of a ramrod boldly thrust into the flames, would be better and even more expeditiously cooked upon burning coals. Moved in his practical nature, he was surprised to find this curious creature of disorganized nerves and useless impulses informed with an intelligence that did not preclude the welfare of humanity or the existence of a soul. He respected her for some minutes, until in the midst of a culinary triumph a big tear dropped and spluttered in the saucepan. But he forgave the irrelevancy by taking no notice of it, and by doing full justice to that particular dish.

Nevertheless, he asked several questions based upon these recently discovered qualities. It appeared that in the old days of her wanderings with the circus troupe she had often been forced to undertake this nomadic housekeeping. But she "despised it," had never done it since, and always had refused to do it for "him" — the personal pronoun referring, as Low understood, to her lover, Curson. Not caring to revive these memories further, Low briefly concluded: —

"I don't know what you were, or what you may be, but from what I see of you you 've got all the sabe of a frontiersman's wife."

She stopped and looked at him, and then, with an impulse of impudence that only half concealed a more serious vanity, asked, "Do you think I might have made a good squaw?"

"I don't know," he replied quietly. "I never saw enough of them to know."

Teresa, confident from his clear eyes that he spoke the truth, but having nothing ready to follow this calm disposal of her curiosity, relapsed into silence.

The meal finished, Teresa washed their scant table equipage in a little spring near the camp-fire; where, catching sight of her disordered dress and collar, she rapidly threw her shawl, after the national fashion, over her shoulder and pinned it quickly. Low cached the remaining provisions and the few cooking-utensils under the dead embers and ashes, obliterating all superficial indication of their camp-fire as deftly and artistically as he had before.

"There is n't the ghost of a chance," he said in explanation, "that anybody but you or I will set foot here before we come back to supper, but it 's well to be on guard. I 'll take you back to the cabin now, though I bet you could find your way there as well as I can."

On their way back Teresa ran ahead of her companion, and plucking a few tiny leaves from a hidden oasis in the bark-strewn trail brought them to him.

"That 's the kind you 're looking for, is n't it?" she said half timidly.

"It is," responded Low, in gratified surprise; "but how did you know it? You 're not a botanist, are you?"

"I reckon not," said Teresa; "but you picked some when we came, and I noticed what they were."

Here was indeed another revelation. Low stopped and gazed at her with such frank, open, utterly unabashed curiosity that her black eyes fell before him.

"And do you think," he asked with logical deliberation, "that you could find any plant from another I should give you?"

"Yes."

"Or from a drawing of it?"

"Yes; perhaps even if you described it to me."

A half-confidential, half-fraternal silence followed.

"I tell you what. I 've got a book" —

"I know it," interrupted Teresa; "full of these things."

"Yes. Do you think you could" —

"Of course I could," broke in Teresa again.

"But you don't know what I mean," said the imperturbable Low.

"Certainly I do. Why, find 'em, and preserve all the different ones for you to write under — that 's it, is n't it?"

Low nodded his head, gratified, but not entirely convinced that she had fully estimated the magnitude of the endeavor.

"I suppose," said Teresa, in the feminine proscriptum voice which it would seem entered even the philosophical calm of the aisles they were treading — "I suppose that *she* places great value on them?"

Low had indeed heard Science personified before, nor was it at all impossible that the singular woman walking by his side had also. He said, "Yes;" but added, in mental reference to the Linnæan Society of San Francisco, that "*they* were rather particular about the rarer kinds."

Content as Teresa had been to believe in Low's tender relations with some favored *one* of her sex, this frank confession of a plural devotion staggered her.

"They?" she repeated.

"Yes," he continued calmly. "The Botanical Society

I correspond with are more particular than the Government Survey."

"Then you are doing this for a society?" demanded Teresa, with a stare.

"Certainly. I 'm making a collection and classification of specimens. I intend — but what are you looking at?"

Teresa had suddenly turned away. Putting his hand lightly on her shoulder, the young man brought her face to face with him again. She was laughing.

"I thought all the while it was for a girl," she said; "and" — But here the mere effort of speech sent her off into an audible and genuine outburst of laughter. It was the first time he had seen her even smile other than bitterly. Characteristically unconscious of any humor in her error, he remained unembarrassed. But he could not help noticing a change in the expression of her face, her voice, and even her intonation. It seemed as if that fit of laughter had loosed the last ties that bound her to a self-imposed character, had swept away the last barrier between her and her healthier nature, had dispossessed a painful unreality, and relieved the morbid tension of a purely nervous attitude. The change in her utterance and the resumption of her softer Spanish accent seemed to have come with her confidences, and Low took leave of her before their sylvan cabin with a comrade's heartiness, and a complete forgetfulness that her voice had ever irritated him.

When he returned that afternoon he was startled to find the cabin empty. But instead of bearing any appearance of disturbance or hurried flight, the rude interior seemed to have magically assumed a decorous order and cleanliness unknown before. Fresh bark hid the inequalities of the floor. The skins and blankets were folded in the corners, the rude shelves were carefully arranged; even a few tall

ferns and bright but quickly fading flowers were disposed around the blackened chimney. She had evidently availed herself of the change of clothing he had brought her, for her late garments were hanging from the hastily-devised wooden pegs driven in the wall. The young man gazed around him with mixed feelings of gratification and uneasiness. His presence had been dispossessed in a single hour; his ten years of lonely habitation had left no trace that this woman had not effaced with a deft move of her hand. More than that, it looked as if she had always occupied it; and it was with a singular conviction that even when she should occupy it no longer it would only revert to him as her dwelling, that he dropped the bark shutters athwart the opening, and left it to follow her.

To his quick ear, fine eye, and abnormal senses, this was easy enough. She had gone in the direction of this morning's camp. Once or twice he paused with a half-gesture of recognition and a characteristic "Good!" at the place where she had stopped, but was surprised to find that her main course had been as direct as his own. Deviating from this direct line with Indian precaution he first made a circuit of the camp, and approached the shattered trunk from the opposite direction. He consequently came upon Teresa unawares. But the momentary astonishment and embarrassment were his alone.

He scarcely recognized her. She was wearing the garments he had brought her the day before — a certain discarded gown of Miss Nellie Wynn, which he had hurriedly begged from her under the pretext of clothing the wife of a distressed overland emigrant then on the way to the mines. Although he had satisfied his conscience with the intention of confessing the pious fraud to her when Teresa was gone and safe from pursuit, it was not without a sense of remorse that he witnessed the sacreligious transformation. The two women were nearly the same height and size; and although

Teresa's maturer figure accented the outlines more strongly, it was still becoming enough to increase his irritation.

Of this becomingness she was doubtless unaware at the moment that he surprised her. She was conscious of having "a change," and this had emboldened her to "do her hair" and otherwise compose herself. After their greeting she was the first to allude to the dress, regretting that it was not more of a rough disguise, and that, as she must now discard the national habit of wearing her shawl "manta" fashion over her head, she wanted a hat. "But you must not," she said, "borrow any more dresses for me from your young woman. Buy them for me at some shop. They left me enough money for that." Low gently put aside the few pieces of gold she had drawn from her pocket, and briefly reminded her of the suspicion such a purchase by him would produce. "That's so," she said with a laugh. "Caramba! what a mule I'm becoming! Ah! wait a moment. I have it! Buy me a common felt hat — a man's hat — as if for yourself, as a change to that animal," pointing to the fox-tailed cap he wore summer and winter, "and I'll show you a trick. I haven't run a theatrical wardrobe for nothing." Nor had she, for the hat thus procured, a few days later, became, by the aid of a silk handkerchief and a bluejay's feather, a fascinating "pork pie."

Whatever cause of annoyance to Low still lingered in Teresa's dress, it was soon forgotten in a palpable evidence of Teresa's value as botanical assistant. It appeared that during the afternoon she had not only duplicated his specimens, but had discovered one or two rare plants as yet unclassified in the flora of the Carquinez Woods. He was delighted, and in turn, over the camp-fire, yielded up some details of his present life and some earlier recollections.

"You don't remember anything of your father?" she asked. "Did he ever try to seek you out?"

"No! Why should he?" replied the imperturbable Low; "he was not a Cherokee."

"No, he was a beast," responded Teresa promptly. "And your mother — do you remember her?"

"No, I think she died."

"You *think* she died? Don't you know?"

"No!"

"Then you're another!" said Teresa. Notwithstanding this frankness, they shook hands for the night; Teresa nestling like a rabbit in a hollow by the side of the campfire; Low with his feet towards it, Indian-wise, and his head and shoulders pillowed on his haversack, only half distinguishable in the darkness beyond.

With such trivial details three uneventful days slipped by. Their retreat was undisturbed, nor could Low detect, by the least evidence to his acute perceptive faculties, that any intruding feet had since crossed the belt of shade. The echoes of passing events at Indian Spring had recorded the escape of Teresa as occurring at a remote and purely imaginative distance, and her probable direction the county of Yolo.

"Can you remember," he one day asked her, "what time it was when you cut the riata and got away?"

Teresa pressed her hands upon her eyes and temples.

"About three, I reckon."

"And you were here at seven; you could have covered some ground in four hours?"

"Perhaps — I don't know," she said, her voice taking up its old quality again. "Don't ask me — I ran all the way."

Her face was quite pale as she removed her hands from her eyes, and her breath came as quickly as if she had just finished that race for life.

"Then you think I am safe here?" she added, after a pause.

"Perfectly — until they find you are *not* in Yolo. Then they 'll look here. And *that* 's the time for you to go *there*."

Teresa smiled timidly. "It will take them some time to search Yolo — unless," she added, "you 're tired of me here." The charming *non sequitur* did not, however, seem to strike the young man. "I 've got time yet to find a few more plants for you," she suggested.

"Oh, certainly!"

"And give you a few more lessons in cooking."

"Perhaps."

The conscientious and literal Low was beginning to doubt if she were really practical. How otherwise could she trifle with such a situation?

It must be confessed that that day and the next she did trifle with it. She gave herself up to a grave and delicious languor that seemed to flow from shadow and silence and permeate her entire being. She passed hours in a thoughtful repose of mind and spirit that seemed to fall like balm from those steadfast guardians, and distill their gentle ether in her soul; or breathed into her listening ear immunity from the forgotten past and security for the present. If there was no dream of the future in this calm, even recurrence of placid existence, so much the better. The simple details of each succeeding day, the quaint housekeeping, the brief companionship and coming and going of her young host, — himself at best a crystallized personification of the sedate and hospitable woods, — satisfied her feeble cravings. She no longer regretted the inferior passion that her fears had obliged her to take the first night she came; she began to look up to this young man — so much younger than herself — without knowing what it meant; it was not until she found that this attitude did not detract from his picturesqueness that she discovered herself seeking for reasons to degrade him from this seductive eminence.

A week had elapsed with little change. On two days he had been absent all day, returning only in time to sup in the hollow tree, which, thanks to the final removal of the dead bear from its vicinity, was now considered a safer retreat than the exposed camp-fire. On the first of these occasions she received him with some preoccupation, paying but little heed to the scant gossip he brought from Indian Spring, and retiring early under the plea of fatigue, that he might seek his own distant camp-fire, which, thanks to her stronger nerves and regained courage, she no longer required so near. On the second occasion, he found her writing a letter more or less blotted with her tears. When it was finished, she begged him to post it at Indian Spring, where in two days an answer would be returned, under cover, to him.

"I hope you will be satisfied then," she added.

"Satisfied with what?" queried the young man.

"You 'll see," she replied, giving him her cold hand. "Good-night."

"But can't you tell me now?" he remonstrated, retaining her hand.

"Wait two days longer — it is n't much," was all she vouchsafed to answer.

The two days passed. Their former confidence and good fellowship were fully restored when the morning came on which he was to bring the answer from the post-office at Indian Spring. He had talked again of his future, and had recorded his ambition to procure the appointment of naturalist to a Government Surveying Expedition. She had even jocularly proposed to dress herself in man's attire and "enlist" as his assistant.

"But you will be safe with your friends, I hope, by that time," responded Low.

"Safe with my friends," she repeated in a lower voice. "Safe with my friends — yes!" An awkward silence

followed. Teresa broke it gayly: "But your girl, your sweetheart, my benefactor — will *she* let you go?"

"I have n't told her yet," said Low gravely, "but I don't see why she should object."

"Object, indeed!" interrupted Teresa in a high voice and a sudden and utterly gratuitous indignation; "how should she? I'd like to see her do it!"

She accompanied him some distance to the intersection of the trail, where they parted in good spirits. On the dusty plain without a gale was blowing that rocked the high treetops above her, but, tempered and subdued, entered the low aisles with a fluttering breath of morning and a sound like the cooing of doves. Never had the wood before shown so sweet a sense of security from the turmoil and tempest of the world beyond; never before had an intrusion from the outer life — even in the shape of a letter — seemed so wicked a desecration. Tempted by the solicitation of air and shade, she lingered, with Low's herbarium slung on her shoulder.

A strange sensation, like a shiver, suddenly passed across her nerves, and left them in a state of rigid tension. With every sense morbidly acute, with every faculty strained to its utmost, the subtle instincts of Low's woodcraft transformed and possessed her. She knew it now! A new element was in the wood — a strange being — another life — another man approaching! She did not even raise her head to look about her, but darted with the precision and fleetness of an arrow in the direction of her tree. But her feet were arrested, her limbs paralyzed, her very existence suspended, by the sound of a voice: —

"Teresa!"

It was a voice that had rung in her ears for the last two years in all phases of intensity, passion, tenderness, and anger; a voice upon whose modulations, rude and unmusical though they were, her heart and soul had hung

in transport or anguish. But it was a chime that had rung its last peal to her senses as she entered the Carquinez Woods, and for the last week had been as dead to her as a voice from the grave. It was the voice of her lover — Dick Curson!

CHAPTER V

THE wind was blowing towards the stranger, so that he was nearly upon her when Teresa first took the alarm. He was a man over six feet in height, strongly built, with a slight tendency to a roundness of bulk which suggested reserved rather than impeded energy. His thick beard and mustache were closely cropped around a small and handsome mouth that lisped except when he was excited, but always kept fellowship with his blue eyes in a perpetual smile of half-cynical good humor. His dress was superior to that of the locality; his general expression that of a man of the world, albeit a world of San Francisco, Sacramento, and Murderer's Bar. He advanced towards her with a laugh and an outstretched hand.

"*You* here!" she gasped, drawing back.

Apparently neither surprised nor mortified at this reception, he answered frankly, "Yeth. You did n't expect me, I know. But Doloreth showed me the letter you wrote her, and — well — here I am, ready to help you, with two men and a thpare horthe waiting outside the woodth on the blind trail."

"You — *you* — here?" she only repeated.

Curson shrugged his shoulders. "Yeth. Of courth you never expected to thee me again, and leatht of all *here*. I 'll admit that; I 'll thay I would n't if I 'd been in your plathe. I 'll go further, and thay you did n't want to thee me again — anywhere. But it all cometh to the thame thing. Here I am; I read the letter you wrote Doloreth. I read how you were hiding here, under

Dunn'th very nothe, with his whole pothe out, cavorting round and barkin' up the wrong tree. I made up my mind to come down here with a few nathty friends of mine and cut you out under Dunn'th nothe, and run you over into Yuba — that 'th all."

"How dared she show you my letter — *you* of all men? How dared she ask *your* help?" continued Teresa fiercely.

"But she did n't athk my help," he responded coolly. "D—d if I don't think she jutht calculated I 'd be glad to know you were being hunted down and thtarving, that I might put Dunn on your track."

"You lie!" said Teresa furiously; "she was my friend. A better friend than those who professed — *more*," she added, with a contemptuous drawing away of her skirt as if she feared Curson's contamination.

"All right. Thettle that with her when you go back," continued Curson philosophically. "We can talk of that on the way. The thing now ith to get up and get out of thethe woods. Come!"

Teresa's only reply was a gesture of scorn.

"I know all that," continued Curson half soothingly, "but they 're waiting."

"Let them wait. I shall not go."

"What will you do?"

"Stay here — till the wolves eat me."

"Teresa, listen. D— it all — Teresa! — Tita! see here," he said with sudden energy. "I swear to God it 's all right. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones and take a new deal. You shall come back as if nothing had happened, and take your old place as before. I don't mind doing the square thing, all round. If that 's what you mean, if that 's all that stands in the way, why, look upon the thing as settled. There, Tita, old girl, come."

Careless or oblivious of her stony silence and staring eyes, he attempted to take her hand. But she disengaged

herself with a quick movement, drew back, and suddenly crouched like a wild animal about to spring. Curson folded his arms as she leaped to her feet; the little dagger she had drawn from her garter flashed menacingly in the air, but she stopped.

The man before her remained erect, impassive, and silent; the great trees around and beyond her remained erect, impassive, and silent; there was no sound in the dim aisles but the quick panting of her mad passion, no movement in the calm, motionless shadow but the trembling of her uplifted steel. Her arm bent and slowly sank, her fingers relaxed, the knife fell from her hand.

"That 'th quite enough for a thow," he said, with a return to his former cynical ease and a perceptible tone of relief in his voice. "It 'th the thame old Teretha. Well, then, if you won't go with me, go without me; take the led horthe and cut away. Dick Athley and Peterth will follow you over the county line. If you want thome money, there it ith." He took a buckskin purse from his pocket. "If you won't take it from me" — he hesitated as she made no reply — "Athley 'th flush and ready to lend you thome."

She had not seemed to hear him, but had stooped in some embarrassment, picked up the knife and hastily hid it, then with averted face and nervous fingers was beginning to tear strips of loose bark from the nearest trunk.

"Well, what do you thay?"

"I don't want any money, and I shall stay here." She hesitated, looked around her, and then added, with an effort, "I suppose you meant well. Be it so! Let bygones be bygones. You said just now, 'It 's the same old Teresa.' So she is, and seeing she 's the same she 's better here than anywhere else."

There was enough bitterness in her tone to call for Curson's half-perfunctory sympathy.

"That be d—d," he responded quickly. "Jutht thay you'll come, Tita, and" —

She stopped his half-spoken sentence with a negative gesture. "You don't understand. I shall stay here."

"But even if they don't theek you here, you can't live here forever. The friend that you wrote about who wath tho good to you, you know, can't keep you here alwayth; and are you thure you can alwayth trutht her?"

"It is n't a woman — it 's a man." She stopped short, and colored to the line of her forehead. "Who said it was a woman?" she continued fiercely, as if to cover her confusion with a burst of gratuitous anger. "Is that another of your lies?"

Curson's lips, which for a moment had completely lost their smile, were now drawn together in a prolonged whistle. He gazed curiously at her gown, at her hat, at the bow of bright ribbon that tied her black hair, and said, "Ah!"

"A poor man who has kept my secret," she went on hurriedly; "a man as friendless and lonely as myself. Yes," disregarding Curson's cynical smile, "a man who has shared everything" —

"Naturally," suggested Curson.

"And turned himself out of his only shelter to give me a roof and covering," she continued mechanically, struggling with the new and horrible fancy that his words awakened.

"And thlept every night at Indian Thpring to save your reputation," said Curson. "Of courthe."

Teresa turned very white. Curson was prepared for an outburst of fury — perhaps even another attack. But the crushed and beaten woman only gazed at him with frightened and imploring eyes. "For God's sake, Dick, don't say that!"

The amiable cynic was staggered. His good humor

and a certain chivalrous instinct he could not repress got the better of him. He shrugged his shoulders. "What I thay and what you *do*, Teretha, need n't make us quarrel. I 've no claim on you — I know it. Only" — a vivid sense of the ridiculous, powerful in men of his stamp, completed her victory — "only don't thay anything about my coming down here to cut you out from the — the — *the sheriff*." He gave utterance to a short but unaffected laugh, made a slight grimace, and turned to go.

Teresa did not join in his mirth. Awkward as it would have been if he had taken a severer view of the subject, she was mortified even amidst her fears and embarrassment at his levity. Just as she had become convinced that his jealousy had made her over-conscious, his apparent good-humored indifference gave that over-consciousness a guilty significance. Yet this was lost in her sudden alarm as her companion, looking up, uttered an exclamation, and placed his hand upon his revolver. With a sinking conviction that the climax had come, Teresa turned her eyes. From the dim aisles beyond, Low was approaching. The catastrophe seemed complete.

She had barely time to utter an imploring whisper: "In the name of God, not a word to him." But a change had already come over her companion. It was no longer a parley with a foolish woman; he had to deal with a man like himself. As Low's dark face and picturesque figure came nearer, Mr. Curson's proposed method of dealing with him was made audible.

"Ith it a mulatto or a Thircuth, or both?" he asked, with affected anxiety.

Low's Indian phlegm was impervious to such assault. He turned to Teresa, without apparently noticing her companion. "I turned back," he said quietly, "as soon as I knew there were strangers here; I thought you might need

me." She noticed for the first time that, in addition to his rifle, he carried a revolver and hunting-knife in his belt.

"Yeth," returned Curson, with an ineffectual attempt to imitate Low's phlegm; "but ath I did n't happen to be a sthranger to thith lady, perhaps it wath n't nethethary, particularly ath I had two friends" —

"Waiting at the edge of the wood with a led horse," interrupted Low, without addressing him, but apparently continuing his explanation to Teresa. But she turned to Low with feverish anxiety.

"That 's so — he is an old friend" — she gave a quick, imploring glance at Curson — "an old friend who came to help me away — he is very kind," she stammered, turning alternately from the one to the other; "but I told him there was no hurry — at least to-day — that you — were — very good — too, and would hide me a little longer until your plan — you know *your* plan," she added, with a look of beseeching significance to Low — "could be tried." And then, with a helpless conviction that her excuses, motives, and emotions were equally and perfectly transparent to both men, she stopped in a tremble.

"Perhapth it 'th jutht ath well, then, that the gentleman came thraight here, and did n't tackle my two friendth when he pathed them," observed Curson half sarcastically.

"I have not passed your friends, nor have I been near them," said Low, looking at him for the first time, with the same exasperating calm; "or perhaps I should not be *here* or they *there*. I knew that one man entered the wood a few moments ago, and that two men and four horses remained outside."

"That 's true," said Teresa to Curson excitedly — "that 's true. He knows all. He can see without looking, hear without listening. He — he" — she stammered, colored, and stopped.

The two men had faced each other. Curson, after his

first good-natured impulse, had retained no wish to regain Teresa, whom he felt he no longer loved, and yet who, for that very reason perhaps, had awakened his chivalrous instincts. Low, equally on his side, was altogether unconscious of any feeling which might grow into a passion, and prevent him from letting her go with another if for her own safety. They were both men of a certain taste and refinement. Yet, in spite of all this, some vague instinct of the baser male animal remained with them, and they were moved to a mutually aggressive attitude in the presence of the female.

One word more, and the opening chapter of a sylvan Iliad might have begun. But this modern Helen saw it coming, and arrested it with an inspiration of feminine genius. Without being observed, she disengaged her knife from her bosom, and let it fall as if by accident. It struck the ground with the point of its keen blade, bounded, and rolled between them. The two men started, and looked at each other with a foolish air. Curson laughed.

"I reckon she can take care of herthelf," he said, extending his hand to Low. "I 'm off. But if I 'm wanted *she* 'll know where to find me." Low took the proffered hand, but neither of the two men looked at Teresa. The reserve of antagonism once broken, a few words of caution, advice, and encouragement passed between them, in apparent obliviousness of her presence or her personal responsibility. As Curson at last nodded a farewell to her, Low insisted upon accompanying him as far as the horses, and in another moment she was again alone.

She had saved a quarrel between them at the sacrifice of herself, for her vanity was still keen enough to feel that this exhibition of her old weakness had degraded her in their eyes, and, worse, had lost the respect her late restraint had won from Low. They had treated her like a child or a crazy woman, perhaps even now were exchanging criti-

cisms upon her — perhaps pitying her! Yet she had prevented a quarrel, a fight, possibly the death of either one or the other of these men who despised her, for none better knew than she the trivial beginning and desperate end of these encounters. Would they — would Low ever realize it, and forgive her? Her small, dark hands went up to her eyes, and she sank upon the ground. She looked through tear-veiled lashes upon the mute and giant witnesses of her deceit and passion, and tried to draw, from their immovable calm, strength and consolation as before. But even they seemed to stand apart, reserved and forbidding.

When Low returned she hoped to gather from his eyes and manner what had passed between him and her former lover. But beyond a mere gentle abstraction at times he retained his usual calm. She was at last forced to allude to it herself with simulated recklessness.

"I suppose I did n't get a very good character from my last place?" she said, with a laugh.

"I don't understand you," he replied, in evident sincerity.

She bit her lip and was silent. But as they were returning home, she said gently, "I hope you were not angry with me for the lie I told when I spoke of 'your plan.' I could not give the real reason for not returning with — with — that man. But it 's not all a lie. I have a plan — if you have n't. When you are ready to go to Sacramento to take your place, dress me as an Indian boy, paint my face, and let me go with you. You can leave me — there — you know."

"It 's not a bad idea," he responded gravely. "We will see."

On the next day, and the next, the rencontre seemed to be forgotten. The herbarium was already filled with rare specimens. Teresa had even overcome her feminine re-

pugnance to "bugs" and creeping things so far as to assist in his entomological collection. He had drawn from a sacred cache in the hollow of a tree the few worn text-books from which he had studied.

"They seem very precious," she said, with a smile.

"Very," he replied gravely. "There was one with plates that the ants ate up, and it will be six months before I can afford to buy another."

Teresa glanced hurriedly over his well-worn buckskin suit, at his calico shirt with its pattern almost obliterated by countless washings, and became thoughtful.

"I suppose you could n't buy one at Indian Spring?" she said innocently.

For once Low was startled out of his phlegm. "Indian Spring!" he ejaculated; "perhaps not even in San Francisco. These came from the States."

"How did you get them?" persisted Teresa.

"I bought them for skins I got over the ridge."

"I did n't mean that — but no matter. Then you mean to sell that bearskin, don't you?" she added.

Low had, in fact, already sold it, the proceeds having been invested in a gold ring for Miss Nellie, which she scrupulously did not wear except in his presence. In his singular truthfulness he would have frankly confessed it to Teresa, but the secret was not his own. He contented himself with saying that he had disposed of it at Indian Spring. Teresa started, and communicated unconsciously some of her nervousness to her companion. They gazed in each other's eyes with a troubled expression.

"Do you think it was wise to sell that particular skin, which might be identified?" she asked timidly.

Low knitted his arched brows, but felt a strange sense of relief. "Perhaps not," he said carelessly; "but it 's too late now to mend matters."

That afternoon she wrote several letters, and tore them

up. One, however, she retained, and handed it to Low to post at Indian Spring, whither he was going. She called his attention to the superscription being the same as the previous letter, and added, with affected gayety, "But if the answer is n't as prompt, perhaps it will be pleasanter than the last." Her quick feminine eye noticed a little excitement in his manner and a more studious attention to his dress. Only a few days before she would not have allowed this to pass without some mischievous allusion to his mysterious sweetheart; it troubled her greatly now to find that she could not bring herself to this household pleasantry, and that her lip trembled and her eye grew moist as he parted from her.

The afternoon passed slowly. He had said he might not return to supper until late; nevertheless a strange restlessness took possession of her as the day wore on. She put aside her work, — the darning of his stockings, — and rambled aimlessly through the woods. She had wandered she knew not how far, when she was suddenly seized with the same vague sense of a foreign presence which she had felt before. Could it be Curson again, with a word of warning? No! she knew it was not he; so subtle had her sense become that she even fancied that she detected in the invisible aura projected by the unknown no significance or relation to herself or Low, and felt no fear. Nevertheless she deemed it wisest to seek the protection of her sylvan bower, and hurried swiftly thither.

But not so quickly nor directly that she did not once or twice pause in her flight to examine the new-comer from behind a friendly trunk. He was a stranger — a young fellow with a brown mustache, wearing heavy Mexican spurs in his riding-boots, whose tinkling he apparently did not care to conceal. He had perceived her, and was evidently pursuing her, but so awkwardly and timidly that she eluded him with ease. When she had reached the security of the

hollow tree, and had pulled the curtain of bark before the narrow opening, with her eye to the interstices, she waited his coming. He arrived breathlessly in the open space before the tree where the bear once lay; the dazed, bewildered, and half-awed expression of his face, as he glanced around him and through the openings of the forest aisles, brought a faint smile to her saddened face. At last he called in a half-embarrassed voice, —

"Miss Nellie!"

The smile faded from Teresa's cheek. Who was "Miss Nellie"? She pressed her ear to the opening. "Miss Wynn!" the voice again called, but was lost in the echoless woods. Devoured with a new and gratuitous curiosity, in another moment Teresa felt she would have disclosed herself at any risk, but the stranger rose and began to retrace his steps. Long after his tinkling spurs were lost in the distance, Teresa remained like a statue, staring at the place where he had stood. Then she suddenly turned like a mad woman, glanced down at the gown she was wearing, tore it from her back as if it had been a polluted garment, and stamped upon it in a convulsion of rage. And then, with her beautiful bare arms clasped together over her head, she threw herself upon her couch in a tempest of tears.

CHAPTER VI

When Miss Nellie reached the first mining extension of Indian Spring, which surrounded it like a fosse, she descended for one instant into one of its trenches, opened her parasol, removed her duster, hid it under a boulder, and with a few shivers and cat-like strokes of her soft hands not only obliterated all material traces of the stolen cream of Carquinez Woods, but assumed a feline demureness quite inconsistent with any moral dereliction. Unfortunately, she forgot to remove at the same time a certain ring from her third finger, which she had put on with her duster and had worn at no other time. With this slight exception, the benignant fate which always protected that young person brought her in contact with the Burnham girls at one end of the main street as the returning coach to Excelsior entered the other, and enabled her to take leave of them before the coach-office with a certain ostentation of parting which struck Mr. Jack Brace, who was lingering at the doorway, into a state of utter bewilderment.

Here was Miss Nellie Wynn, the belle of Excelsior, calm, quiet, self-possessed, her chaste cambric skirts and dainty shoes as fresh as when she had left her father's house; but where was the woman of the brown duster, and where the yellow-dressed apparition of the woods? He was feebly repeating to himself his mental adjuration of a few hours before when he caught her eye, and was taken with a blush and a fit of coughing. Could he have been such an egregious fool, and was it not plainly written on his embarrassed face for her to read?

"Are we going down together?" asked Miss Nellie, with an exceptionally gracious smile.

There was neither affectation nor coquetry in this advance. The girl had no idea of Brace's suspicion of her, nor did any uneasy desire to placate or deceive a possible rival of Low's prompt her graciousness. She simply wished to shake off in this encounter the already stale excitement of the past two hours, as she had shaken the dust of the woods from her clothes. It was characteristic of her irresponsible nature and transient susceptibilities that she actually enjoyed the relief of change; more than that, I fear, she looked upon this infidelity to a past dubious pleasure as a moral principle. A mild, open flirtation with a recognized man like Brace, after her secret passionate tryst with a nameless nomad like Low, was an ethical equipoise that seemed proper to one of her religious education.

Brace was only too happy to profit by Miss Nellie's condescension; he at once secured the seat by her side, and spent the four hours and a half of their return journey to Excelsior in blissful but timid communion with her. If he did not dare to confess his past suspicions, he was equally afraid to venture upon the boldness he had premeditated a few hours before. He was therefore obliged to take a middle course of slightly egotistical narration of his own personal adventures, with which he beguiled the young girl's ear. This he only departed from once, to describe to her a valuable grizzly bearskin which he had seen that day for sale at Indian Spring, with a view to divining her possible acceptance of it for a "buggy robe;" and once to comment upon a ring which she had inadvertently disclosed in pulling off her glove.

"It 's only an old family keepsake," she added, with easy mendacity; and affecting to recognize in Mr. Brace's curiosity a not unnatural excuse for toying with her charm-

ing fingers, she hid them in chaste and virginal seclusion in her lap, until she could re-cover the ring and resume her glove.

A week passed — a week of peculiar and desiccating heat for even those dry Sierra table-lands. The long days were filled with impalpable dust and acrid haze suspended in the motionless air; the nights were breathless and dewless — the cold wind which usually swept down from the snow-line was laid to sleep over a dark monotonous level, whose horizon was pricked with the eating fires of burning forest crests. The lagging coach of Indian Spring drove up at Excelsior, and precipitated its passengers with an accompanying cloud of dust before the Excelsior Hotel. As they emerged from the coach, Mr. Brace, standing in the doorway, closely scanned their begrimed and almost unrecognizable faces. They were the usual type of travelers: a single professional man in dusty black, a few traders in tweeds and flannels, a sprinkling of miners in red and gray shirts, a Chinaman, a negro, and a Mexican packer or muleteer. This latter for a moment mingled with the crowd in the bar-room, and even penetrated the corridor and dining-room of the hotel, as if impelled by a certain semi-civilized curiosity, and then strolled with a lazy, dragging step — half impeded by the enormous leather leggings, chains, and spurs, peculiar to his class — down the main street. The darkness was gathering, but the muleteer indulged in the same childish scrutiny of the dimly lighted shops, magazines, and saloons, and even of the occasional groups of citizens at the street corners. Apparently young, as far as the outlines of his figure could be seen, he seemed to show even more than the usual concern of masculine Excelsior in the charms of womankind. The few female figures about at that hour, or visible at window or veranda, received his marked attention; he respectfully followed the

two auburn-haired daughters of Deacon Johnson on their way to choir-meeting to the door of the church. Not content with that act of discreet gallantry, after they had entered he managed to slip in unperceived behind them.

The memorial of the Excelsior gamblers' generosity was a modern building, large and pretentious for even Mr. Wynn's popularity, and had been good-humoredly known, in the characteristic language of the generous donors, as one of the "biggest religious bluffs" on record. Its groined rafters, which were so new and spicy that they still suggested their native forest aisles, seldom covered more than a hundred devotees, and in the rambling choir, with its bare space for the future organ, the few choristers, gathered round a small harmonium, were lost in the deepening shadow of that summer evening. The muleteer remained hidden in the obscurity of the vestibule. After a few moments' desultory conversation, in which it appeared that the unexpected absence of Miss Nellie Wynn, their leader, would prevent their practicing, the choristers withdrew. The stranger, who had listened eagerly, drew back in the darkness as they passed out, and remained for a few moments a vague and motionless figure in the silent church. Then coming cautiously to the window, the flapping broad-brimmed hat was put aside, and the faint light of the dying day shone in the black eyes of Teresa! Despite her face, darkened with dye and disfigured with dust, the matted hair piled and twisted around her head, the strange dress and boyish figure, one swift glance from under her raised lashes betrayed her identity.

She turned aside mechanically into the first pew, picked up and opened a hymn-book. Her eyes became riveted on a name written on the title-page, "Nellie Wynn." *Her* name, and *her* book. The instinct that had guided her here was right; the slight gossip of her fellow passengers was right; this was the clergyman's daughter, whose praise

filled all mouths. This was the unknown girl the stranger was seeking, but who in her turn perhaps had been seeking Low — the girl who absorbed his fancy — the secret of his absences, his preoccupation, his coldness! This was the girl whom to see, perhaps in his arms, she was now periling her liberty and her life, unknown to him! A slight odor, some faint perfume of its owner, came from the book: it was the same she had noticed in the dress Low had given her. She flung the volume to the ground, and, throwing her arms over the back of the pew before her, buried her face in her hands.

In that light and attitude she might have seemed some rapt acolyte abandoned to self-communion. But whatever yearning her soul might have had for higher sympathy or deeper consolation, I fear that the spiritual tabernacle of Excelsior and the Rev. Mr. Wynn did not meet that requirement. She only felt the dry, oven-like heat of that vast shell, empty of sentiment and beauty, hollow in its pretense, and dreary in its desolation. She only saw in it a chief altar for the glorification of this girl who had absorbed even the pure worship of her companion, and converted and degraded his sublime paganism to her petty creed. With a woman's withering contempt for her own art displayed in another woman, she thought how she herself could have touched him with the peace that the majesty of their woodland aisles — so unlike this pillared sham — had taught her own passionate heart, had she but dared. Mingling with this imperfect theology, she felt she could have proved to him also that a brunette and a woman of her experience was better than an immature blonde. She began to loathe herself for coming hither, and dreaded to meet his face. Here a sudden thought struck her. What if he had not come here? What if she had been mistaken? What if her rash interpretation of his absence from the woods that night was simple madness? What if he should return — if

he had already returned? She rose to her feet, whitening, yet joyful with the thought. She would return at once; what was the girl to her now? Yet there was time to satisfy herself if he were at *her* house. She had been told where it was; she could find it in the dark; an open door or window would betray some sign or sound of the occupants. She rose, replaced her hat over her eyes, knotted her flaunting scarf around her throat, groped her way to the door, and glided into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER VII

It was quite dark when Mr. Jack Brace stopped before Father Wynn's open door. The windows were also invitingly open to the wayfarer, as were the pastoral counsels of Father Wynn, delivered to some favored guest within, in a tone of voice loud enough for a pulpit. Jack Brace paused. The visitor was the convalescent sheriff, Jim Dunn, who had publicly commemorated his recovery by making his first call upon the father of his inamorata. The Rev. Mr. Wynn had been expatiating upon the unremitting heat as a possible precursor of forest fires, and exhibiting some catholic knowledge of the designs of a Deity in that regard, and what should be the policy of the Legislature, when Mr. Brace concluded to enter. Mr. Wynn and the wounded man, who occupied an armchair by the window, were the only occupants of the room. But in spite of the former's ostentatious greeting, Brace could see that his visit was inopportune and unwelcome. The sheriff nodded a quick, impatient recognition, which, had it not been accompanied by an anathema on the heat, might have been taken as a personal insult. Neither spoke of Miss Nellie, although it was patent to Brace that they were momentarily expecting her — all of which went far to strengthen a certain wavering purpose in his mind.

"Ah, ha! strong language, Mr. Dunn," said Father Wynn, referring to the sheriff's adjuration; "but 'out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh.' Job, sir, cursed, we are told, and even expressed himself in vigorous Hebrew regarding his birthday. Ha, ha! I'm not op-

posed to that. When I have often wrestled with the spirit I confess I have sometimes said, 'D—n you.' Yes, sir, 'D—n you.'"

There was something so unutterably vile in the reverend gentleman's utterance and emphasis of this oath that the two men, albeit both easy and facile blasphemers, felt shocked; as the purest of actresses is apt to overdo the rakishness of a gay Lothario, Father Wynn's immaculate conception of an imprecation was something terrible. But he added, "The law ought to interfere with the reckless use of camp-fires in the woods in such weather by packers and prospectors."

"It is n't so much the work of white men," broke in Brace, "as it is of Greasers, Chinamen, and Diggers, especially Diggers. There 's that blasted Low, ranges the whole Carquinez Woods as if they were his. I reckon he ain't particular just where he throws his matches."

"But he 's not a Digger; he 's a Cherokee, and only a half-breed at that," interpolated Wynn. "Unless," he added, with the artful suggestion of the betrayed trust of a too credulous Christian, "he deceived me in this as in other things."

In what other things Low had deceived him he did not say; but, to the astonishment of both men, Dunn growled a dissent to Brace's proposition. Either from some secret irritation with that possible rival, or impatience at the prolonged absence of Nellie, he had "had enough of that sort of hog-wash ladled out to him for genuine liquor." As to the Carquinez Woods, he [Dunn] "did n't know why Low had n't as much right there as if he 'd grabbed it under a preëmption law and did n't live there." With this hint at certain speculations of Father Wynn in public lands for a homestead, he added that "if they [Brace and Wynn] could bring him along any older American settler than an Indian, they might rake down his [Dunn's] pile." Unprepared

for this turn in the conversation, Wynn hastened to explain that he did not refer to the pure aborigine, whose gradual extinction no one regretted more than himself, but to the mongrel, who inherited only the vices of civilization. "There should be a law, sir, against the mingling of races. There are men, sir, who violate the laws of the Most High by living with Indian women — squaw men, sir, as they are called."

Dunn rose with a face livid with weakness and passion. "Who dares say that? They are a d—d sight better than sneaking Northern Abolitionists, who married their daughters to buck niggers like" — But a spasm of pain withheld this Parthian shot at the politics of his two companions, and he sank back helplessly in his chair.

An awkward silence ensued. The three men looked at each other in embarrassment and confusion. Dunn felt that he had given way to a gratuitous passion; Wynn had a vague presentiment that he had said something that imperiled his daughter's prospects; and Brace was divided between an angry retort and the secret purpose already alluded to.

"It's all the blasted heat," said Dunn, with a forced smile, pushing away the whiskey which Wynn had ostentatiously placed before him.

"Of course," said Wynn hastily; "only it's a pity Nellie ain't here to give you her smelling-salts. She ought to be back now," he added, no longer mindful of Brace's presence; "the coach is over-due now, though I reckon the heat made Yuba Bill take it easy at the up grade."

"If you mean the coach from Indian Spring," said Brace quietly, "it's in already; but Miss Nellie did n't come on it."

"Maybe she got out at the Crossing," said Wynn cheerfully; "she sometimes does."

"She did n't take the coach at Indian Spring," returned

Brace, "because I saw it leave, and passed it on Buckskin ten minutes ago, coming up the hills."

"She 's stopped over at Burnham's," said Wynn reflectively. Then, in response to the significant silence of his guests, he added, in a tone of chagrin which his forced heartiness could not disguise, "Well, boys, it 's a disappointment all round; but we must take the lesson as it comes. I 'll go over to the coach-office and see if she 's sent any word. Make yourselves at home until I return."

When the door had closed behind him, Brace arose and took his hat as if to go. With his hand on the lock, he turned to his rival, who, half-hidden in the gathering darkness, still seemed unable to comprehend his ill luck.

"If you 're waiting for that bald-headed fraud to come back with the truth about his daughter," said Brace coolly, "you 'd better send for your things and take up your lodgings here."

"What do you mean?" said Dunn sternly.

"I mean that she 's not at the Burnhams'; I mean that he does or does not know *where* she is, and that in either case he is not likely to give you information. But I can."

"You can?"

"Yes."

"Then, where is she?"

"In the Carquinez Woods, in the arms of the man you were just defending — Low, the half-breed."

The room had become so dark that from the road nothing could be distinguished. Only the momentary sound of struggling feet was heard.

"Sit down," said Brace's voice, "and don't be a fool. You 're too weak, and it ain't a fair fight. Let go your hold. I 'm not lying — I wish to God I was!"

There was a silence, and Brace resumed, "We 've been rivals, I know. Maybe I thought my chance as good as

yours. If what I say ain't truth, we 'll stand as we stood before; and if you 're on the shoot, I 'm your man when you like, where you like, or on sight if you choose. But I can't see another man played upon as I 've been played upon — given dead away as I have been. It ain't on the square.

"There," he continued, after a pause, "that 's right; now steady. Listen. A week ago that girl went down just like this to Indian Spring. It was given out, like this, that she went to the Burnhams'. I don't mind saying, Dunn, that I went down myself, all on the square, thinking I might get a show to talk to her, just as *you* might have done, you know, if you had my chance. I did n't come across her anywhere. But two men that I met thought they recognized her in a disguise going into the woods. Not suspecting anything, I went after her; saw her at a distance in the middle of the woods in another dress that I can swear to, and was just coming up to her when she vanished — went like a squirrel up a tree, or down like a gopher in the ground, but vanished."

"Is that all?" said Dunn's voice. "And just because you were a d—d fool, or had taken a little too much whiskey, you thought" —

"Steady! That 's just what I said to myself," interrupted Brace coolly, "particularly when I saw her that same afternoon in another dress, saying good-by to the Burnhams, as fresh as a rose and as cold as those snow-peaks. Only one thing — she had a ring on her finger she never wore before, and did n't expect me to see."

"What if she did? She might have bought it. I reckon she has n't to consult you," broke in Dunn's voice sternly.

"She did n't buy it," continued Brace quietly. "Low gave that Jew trader a bearskin in exchange for it, and presented it to her. I found that out two days afterwards.

I found out that out of the whole afternoon she spent less than an hour with the Burnhams. I found out that she bought a duster like the disguise the two men saw her in. I found the yellow dress she wore that day hanging up in Low's cabin — the place where I saw her go — the *rendezvous where she meets him.* Oh, you 're listenin', are you? Stop! SIT DOWN!

"I discovered it by accident," continued the voice of Brace when all was again quiet; "it was hidden as only a squirrel or an Injin can hide when they improve upon nature. When I was satisfied that the girl had been in the woods, I was determined to find out where she vanished, and went there again. Prospecting around, I picked up at the foot of one of the biggest trees this yer old memorandum-book, with grasses and herbs stuck in it. I remembered that I 'd heard old Wynn say that Low, like the d—d Digger that he was, collected these herbs; only he pretended it was for science. I reckoned the book was his and that he might n't be far away. I lay low and waited. Bimeby I saw a lizard running down the root. When he got sight of me he stopped."

"D—n the lizard! What 's that got to do with where she is now?"

"Everything. That lizard had a piece of sugar in his mouth. Where did it come from? I made him drop it, and calculated he 'd go back for more. He did. He scooted up that tree and slipped in under some hanging strips of bark. I shoved 'em aside, and found an opening to the hollow where they do their housekeeping."

"But you did n't see her there — and how do you know she is there now?"

"I determined to make it sure. When she left to-day, I started an hour ahead of her, and hid myself at the edge of the woods. An hour after the coach arrived at Indian Spring, she came there in a brown duster, and was joined

by him. I'd have followed them, but the d—d hound has the ears of a squirrel, and though I was five hundred yards from him he was on his guard."

"Guard be blessed! Was n't you armed? Why did n't you go for him?" said Dunn furiously.

"I reckoned I 'd leave that for you," said Brace coolly. "If he 'd killed me,—and if he 'd even covered me with his rifle, he 'd be sure to let daylight through me at double the distance,—I should n't have been any better off, nor you either. If I 'd killed *him*, it would have been your duty as sheriff to put me in jail; and I reckon it would n't have broken your heart, Jim Dunn, to have got rid of *two* rivals instead of one. Hullo! Where are you going?"

"Going?" said Dunn hoarsely. "Going to the Carquinez Woods, by God! to kill him before her. *I*'ll risk it, if you dare n't. Let me succeed, and you can hang *me*, and take the girl yourself."

"Sit down, sit down. Don't be a fool, Jim Dunn! You would n't keep the saddle a hundred yards. Did I say I would n't help you? No. If you 're willing, we 'll run the risk together, but it must be in my way. Hear me. I 'll drive you down there in a buggy before daylight, and we 'll surprise them in the cabin or as they leave the wood. But you must come as if to arrest him for some offense — say, as an escaped Digger from the Reservation, a dangerous tramp, a destroyer of public property in the forests, a suspected road agent, or anything to give you the right to hunt him. The exposure of him and Nellie, don't you see, must be accidental. If he resists, kill him on the spot, and nobody 'll blame you; if he goes peaceably with you, and you once get him in Excelsior jail, when the story gets out that he 's taken the belle of Excelsior for his squaw, if you 'd the angels for your posse you could n't keep the boys from hanging him to the first tree. What 's that?"

He walked to the window, and looked out cautiously.

"If it was the old man coming back and listening," he said, after a pause, "it can't be helped. He'll hear it soon enough, if he don't suspect something already."

"Look yer, Brace," broke in Dunn hoarsely. "D—d if I understand you, or you me. That dog Low has got to answer to *me*, not to the *law!* I'll take my risk of killing him, on sight and on the square. I don't reckon to handicap myself with a warrant, and I am not going to draw him out with a lie. You hear me? That's me all the time!"

"Then you calkilate to go down thar," said Brace contemptuously, "yell out for him and Nellie, and let him line you on a rest from the first tree as if you were a grizzly."

There was a pause. "What's that you were saying just now about a bearskin he sold?" asked Dunn slowly, as if reflecting.

"He exchanged a bearskin," replied Brace, "with a single hole right over the heart. He's a dead-shot, I tell you."

"D—n his shooting," said Dunn. "I'm not thinking of that. How long ago did he bring in that bearskin?"

"About two weeks, I reckon. Why?"

"Nothing! Look yer, Brace, you mean well — thar's my hand. I'll go down with you there, but not as the sheriff. I'm going there as Jim Dunn, and you can come along as a white man, to see things fixed on the square. Come!"

Brace hesitated. "You'll think better of my plan before you get there; but I've said I'd stand by you, and I will. Come, then. There's no time to lose."

They passed out into the darkness together.

"What are you waiting for?" said Dunn impatiently, as Brace, who was supporting him by the arm, suddenly halted at the corner of the house.

"Some one was listening — did you not see him? Was it the old man?" asked Brace hurriedly.

"Blast the old man! It was only one of them Mexican packers chock-full of whiskey, and trying to hold up the house. What are you thinking of? We shall be late."

In spite of his weakness, the wounded man hurriedly urged Brace forward, until they reached the latter's lodgings. To his surprise, the horse and buggy were already before the door.

"Then you reckoned to go, anyway?" said Dunn, with a searching look at his companion.

"I calkilated *somebody* would go," returned Brace evasively, patting the impatient Buckskin; "but come in and take a drink before we leave."

Dunn started out of a momentary abstraction, put his hand on his hip, and mechanically entered the house. They had scarcely raised the glasses to their lips when a sudden rattle of wheels was heard in the street. Brace set down his glass and ran to the window.

"It 's the mare bolted," he said, with an oath. "We 've kept her too long standing. Follow me;" and he dashed down the staircase into the street. Dunn followed with difficulty; when he reached the door he was confronted by his breathless companion. "She 's gone off on a run, and I'll swear there was a man in the buggy!" He stopped and examined the halter-strap, still fastened to the fence. "Cut! by God!"

Dunn turned pale with passion. "Who 's got another horse and buggy?" he demanded.

"The new blacksmith in Main Street; but we won't get it by borrowing," said Brace.

"How, then?" asked Dunn savagely.

"Seize it, as the sheriff of Yuba and his deputy, pursuing a confederate of the Injin Low — THE HORSE-THIEF!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE brief hour of darkness that preceded the dawn was that night intensified by a dense smoke, which, after blotting out horizon and sky, dropped a thick veil on the high-road and the silent streets of Indian Spring. As the buggy containing Sheriff Dunn and Brace dashed through the obscurity, Brace suddenly turned to his companion.

"Some one ahead!"

The two men bent forward over the dashboard. Above the steady plunging of their own horsehoofs they could hear the quicker, irregular beat of other hoofs in the darkness before them.

"It 's that horse-thief!" said Dunn, in a savage whisper. "Bear to the right, and hand me the whip."

A dozen cuts of the cruel lash, and their maddened horse, bounding at each stroke, broke into a wild canter. The frail vehicle swayed from side to side at each spring of the elastic shafts. Steadying himself by one hand on the low rail, Dunn drew his revolver with the other. "Sing out to him to pull up, or we 'll fire. My voice is clean gone," he added, in a husky whisper.

They were so near that they could distinguish the bulk of a vehicle careering from side to side in the blackness ahead. Dunn deliberately raised his weapon. "Sing out!" he repeated impatiently. But Brace, who was still keeping in the shadow, suddenly grasped his companion's arm.

"Hush! It 's *not* Buckskin," he whispered hurriedly.

"Are you sure?"

"*Don't you see we're gaining on him?*" replied the other contemptuously. Dunn grasped his companion's hand and pressed it silently. Even in that supreme moment this horseman's tribute to the fugitive Buckskin forestalled all baser considerations of pursuit and capture!

In twenty seconds they were abreast of the stranger, crowding his horse and buggy nearly into the ditch; Brace keenly watchful, Dunn suppressed and pale. In half a minute they were leading him a length; and when their horse again settled down to his steady work, the stranger was already lost in the circling dust that followed them. But the victors seemed disappointed. The obscurity had completely hidden all but the vague outlines of the mysterious driver.

"He 's not our game, anyway," whispered Dunn. "Drive on."

"But if it was some friend of his," suggested Brace uneasily, "what would you do?"

"What I *said* I 'd do," responded Dunn savagely. "I don't want five minutes to do it in either; we 'll be half an hour ahead of that d—d fool, whoever he is. Look here; all you 've got to do is to put me in the trail to that cabin. Stand back of me, out of gunshot, alone, if you like, as my deputy, or with any number you can pick up as my posse. If he gets by me as Nellie's lover, you may shoot him or take him as a horse-thief, if you like."

"Then you won't shoot him on sight?"

"Not till I 've had a word with him."

"But"—

"I 've chirped," said the sheriff gravely. "Drive on."

For a few moments only the plunging hoofs and rattling wheels were heard. A dull, lurid glow began to define the horizon. They were silent until an abatement of the smoke, the vanishing of the gloomy horizon line, and a certain impenetrability in the darkness ahead showed them

they were nearing the Carquinez Woods. But they were surprised on entering them to find the dim aisles alight with a faint mystic aurora. The tops of the towering spires above them had caught the gleam of the distant forest fires, and reflected it as from a gilded dome.

"It would be hot work if the Carquinez Woods should conclude to take a hand in this yer little game that 's going on over on the Divide yonder," said Brace, securing his horse and glancing at the spires overhead. "I reckon I 'd rather take a back seat at Injin Spring when the show commences."

Dunn did not reply, but, buttoning his coat, placed one hand on his companion's shoulder, and sullenly bade him "lead the way." Advancing slowly and with difficulty, the desperate man might have been taken for a peaceful invalid returning from an early morning stroll. His right hand was buried thoughtfully in the side pocket of his coat. Only Brace knew that it rested on the handle of his pistol.

From time to time the latter stopped and consulted the faint trail with a minuteness that showed recent careful study. Suddenly he paused. "I made a blaze hereabouts to show where to leave the trail. There it is," he added, pointing to a slight notch cut in the trunk of an adjoining tree.

"But we 've just passed one," said Dunn, "if that 's what you are looking after, a hundred yards back."

Brace uttered an oath, and ran back in the direction signified by his companion. Presently he returned with a smile of triumph.

"They 've suspected something. It 's a clever trick, but it won't hold water. That blaze which was done to muddle you was cut with an axe; this which I made was done with a bowie-knife. It 's the real one. We 're not far off now. Come on."

They proceeded cautiously, at right angles with the

"blazed" tree, for ten minutes more. The heat was oppressive; drops of perspiration rolled from the forehead of the sheriff, and at times, when he attempted to steady his uncertain limbs, his hands shrank from the heated, blistering bark he touched with ungloved palms.

"Here we are," said Brace, pausing at last. "Do you see that biggest tree, with the root stretching out halfway across to the opposite one?"

"No; it's further to the right and abreast of the dead brush," interrupted Dunn quickly, with a sudden revelation that this was the spot where he had found the dead bear, the night Teresa escaped.

"That's so," responded Brace, in astonishment.

"And the opening is on the other side, opposite the dead brush," said Dunn.

"Then you know it?" said Brace suspiciously.

"I reckon!" responded Dunn grimly. "That's enough! Fall back!"

To the surprise of his companion, he lifted his head erect, and with a strong, firm step walked directly to the tree. Reaching it, he planted himself squarely before the opening.

"Halloo!" he said.

There was no reply. A squirrel scampered away close to his feet. Brace, far in the distance, after an ineffectual attempt to distinguish his companion through the intervening trunks, took off his coat, leaned against a tree, and lit a cigar.

"Come out of that cabin!" continued Dunn, in a clear, resonant voice. "Come out before I drag you out!"

"All right, 'Captain Scott.' Don't shoot, and I 'll come down," said a voice as clear and as high as his own. The hanging strips of bark were dashed aside, and a woman leaped lightly to the ground.

Dunn staggered back. "Teresa! by the Eternal!"

It was Teresa, — the old Teresa! — Teresa, a hundred times more vicious, reckless, hysterical, extravagant, and outrageous than before, — Teresa, staring with tooth and eye, sunburnt and embrowned, her hair hanging down her shoulders, and her shawl drawn tightly around her neck.

"Teresa it is! the same old gal! Here we are again! Return of the favorite in her original character! For two weeks only! Houp là! Tshk!" and, catching her yellow skirt with her fingers, she pirouetted before the astounded man, and ended in a pose. Recovering himself with an effort, Dunn dashed forward and seized her by the wrist.

"Answer me, woman! Is that Low's cabin?"

"It is."

"Who occupies it besides?"

"I do."

"And who else?"

"Well," drawled Teresa slowly, with an extravagant affectation of modesty, "nobody else but us, I reckon. Two's company, you know, and three's none."

"Stop! Will you swear that there is n't a young girl, his — his sweetheart — concealed there with you?"

The fire in Teresa's eye was genuine as she answered steadily, "Well, it ain't my style to put up with that sort of thing; at least, it was n't over at Yolo, and you know it, Jim Dunn, or I would n't be here."

"Yes, yes," said Dunn hurriedly. "But I 'm a d—d fool, or worse, the fool of a fool. Tell me, Teresa, is this man Low your lover?"

Teresa lowered her eyes as if in maidenly confusion. "Well, if I 'd known that *you* had any feeling of your own about it — if you 'd spoken sooner"—

"Answer me, you devil!"

"He is."

"And he has been with you here — yesterday — to-night?"

"He has."

"Enough." He laughed a weak, foolish laugh, and, turning pale, suddenly lapsed against a tree. He would have fallen, but with a quick instinct Teresa sprang to his side, and supported him gently to a root. The action over, they both looked astounded.

"I reckon that was n't much like either you or me," said Dunn slowly, "was it? But if you 'd let me drop then you 'd have stretched out the biggest fool in the Sierras." He paused, and looked at her curiously. "What 's come over you; blessed if I seem to know you now."

She was very pale again, and quiet — that was all.

"Teresa! d—n it, look here! When I was laid up yonder in Excelsior I said I wanted to get well for only two things. One was to hunt you down, the other to marry Nellie Wynn. When I came here I thought that last thing could never be. I came here expecting to find her here with Low, and kill him — perhaps kill her too. I never even thought of you; not once. You might have risen up before me — between me and him — and I 'd have passed you by. And now that I find it 's all a mistake, and it was you, not her, I was looking for, why" —

"Why," she interrupted bitterly, "you 'll just take me, of course, to save your time and earn your salary. I 'm ready."

"But, *I* 'm not, just yet," he said faintly. "Help me up." She mechanically assisted him to his feet.

"Now stand where you are," he added, "and don't move beyond this tree till I return."

He straightened himself with an effort, clenched his fists until the nails were nearly buried in his palms, and strode with a firm, steady step in the direction he had come. In a few moments he returned and stood before her.

"I 've sent away my deputy — the man who brought me here, the fool who thought you were Nellie. He knows now he made a mistake. But who it was he mistook for Nellie he does not know, nor shall ever know, nor shall any living being know, other than myself, And when I leave the wood to-day I shall know it no longer. You are safe here as far as I am concerned, but I cannot screen you from others prying. Let Low take you away from here as soon as he can."

"Let him take me away? Ah, yes. For what?"

"To save you," said Dunn. "Look here, Teresa! Without knowing it, you lifted me out of hell just now; and because of the wrong I might have done her — for *her* sake, I spare you and shirk my duty."

"For her sake!" gasped the woman — "for her sake! Oh, yes! Go on."

"Well," said Dunn gloomily, "I reckon perhaps you 'd as lieve left me in hell, for all the love you bear me. And maybe you 've grudge enough agin me still to wish I 'd found her and him together."

"You think so?" she said, turning her head away.

"There, d—n it! I did n't mean to make you cry. Maybe you would n't, then. Only tell that fellow to take you out of this, and not run away the next time he sees a man coming."

"He did n't run," said Teresa, with flashing eyes. "I — I — I sent him away," she stammered. Then, suddenly turning with fury upon him, she broke out, "Run! Run from you! Ha, ha! You said just now I 'd a grudge against you. Well, listen, Jim Dunn. I 'd only to bring you in range of that young man's rifle, and you 'd have dropped in your tracks like" —

"Like that b'ar, the other night," said Dunn, with a short laugh. "So *that* was your little game?" He checked his laugh suddenly — a cloud passed over his face.

"Look here, Teresa," he said, with an assumption of carelessness that was as transparent as it was utterly incompatible with his frank, open selfishness. "What became of that b'ar? The skin — eh? That was worth something?"

"Yes," said Teresa quietly. "Low exchanged it and got a ring for me from that trader Isaacs. It was worth more, you bet. And the ring did n't fit either" —

"Yes," interrupted Dunn, with almost childish eagerness.

"And I made him take it back, and get the value in money. I hear that Isaacs sold it again and made another profit; but that 's like those traders." The disingenuous candor of Teresa's manner was in exquisite contrast to Dunn. He rose and grasped her hand so heartily she was forced to turn her eyes away.

"Good-by!" he said.

"You look tired," she murmured, with a sudden gentleness that surprised him; "let me go with you a part of the way."

"It is n't safe for you just now," he said, thinking of the possible consequences of the alarm Brace had raised.

"Not the way *you* came," she replied; "but one known only to myself."

He hesitated only a moment. "All right, then," he said finally; "let us go at once. It 's suffocating here, and I seem to feel this dead bark crinkle under my feet."

She cast a rapid glance around her, and then seemed to sound with her eyes the far-off depths of the aisles, beginning to grow pale with the advancing day, but still holding a strange quiver of heat in the air. When she had finished her half-abstracted scrutiny of the distance, she cast one backward glance at her own cabin, and stopped.

"Will you wait a moment for me?" she asked gently.

"Yes — but — no tricks, Teresa! It is n't worth the time."

She looked him squarely in the eyes without a word.

"Enough," he said; "go!"

She was absent for some moments. He was beginning to become uneasy, when she made her appearance again clad in her old faded black dress. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were swollen, but she placed his hand on her shoulder, and bidding him not to fear to lean upon her, for she was quite strong, led the way.

"You look more like yourself now, and yet — blast it all! — you don't either," said Dunn, looking down upon her. "You've changed in some way. What is it? Is it on account of that Injin? Could n't you have found a white man in his place?"

"I reckon he's neither worse nor better for that," she replied bitterly; "and perhaps he was n't as particular in his taste as a white man might have been. But," she added, with a sudden spasm of her old rage, "it's a lie; he's *not* an Indian, no more than I am. Not unless being born of a mother who scarcely knew him, of a father who never even saw him, and being brought up among white men and wild beasts less cruel than they were, could make him one!"

Dunn looked at her in surprise not unmixed with admiration. "If Nellie," he thought, "could but love *me* like that!" But he only said: —

"For all that, he's an Injin. Why, look at his name. It ain't Low. It's L'Eau Dormante, Sleeping Water, an Injin name."

"And what does that prove?" returned Teresa. "Only that Indians clap a nickname on any stranger, white or red, who may camp with them. Why, even his own father, a white man, the wretch who begot him and abandoned him, — *he* had an Indian name, — Loup Noir."

"What name did you say?"

"Le Loup Noir, the Black Wolf. I suppose you'd call him an Indian, too? Eh? What's the matter? We're

walking too fast. Stop a moment and rest. There — there, lean on me!"

She was none too soon; for, after holding him upright a moment, his limbs failed, and stooping gently she was obliged to support him half reclining against a tree.

"It's the heat!" he said. "Give me some whiskey from my flask. Never mind the water," he added faintly, with a forced laugh, after he had taken a draught of the strong spirit. "Tell me more about the other water — the Sleeping Water, you know. How do you know all this about him and his — father?"

"Partly from him and partly from Curson, who wrote to me about him," she answered, with some hesitation.

But Dunn did not seem to notice this incongruity of correspondence with a former lover. "And *he* told you?"

"Yes; and I saw the name on an old memorandum-book he has, which he says belonged to his father. It's full of old accounts of some trading-post on the frontier. It's been missing for a day or two, but it will turn up. But I can swear I saw it."

Dunn attempted to rise to his feet. "Put your hand in my pocket," he said in a hurried whisper. "No, there! — bring out a book. There, I have n't looked at it yet. Is that it?" he added, handing her the book Brace had given him a few hours before.

"Yes," said Teresa, in surprise. "Where did you find it?"

"Never mind! Now let me see it quick. Open it, for my sight is failing. There — thank you — that's all!"

"Take more whiskey," said Teresa, with a strange anxiety creeping over her. "You are faint again."

"Wait! Listen, Teresa — lower — put your ear lower. Listen! I came near killing that chap Low to-day. Would n't it have been ridiculous?"

He tried to smile, but his head fell back. He had fainted.

CHAPTER IX

For the first time in her life Teresa lost her presence of mind in an emergency. She could only sit staring at the helpless man, scarcely conscious of his condition, her mind filled with a sudden prophetic intuition of the significance of his last words. In the light of that new revelation she looked into his pale, haggard face for some resemblance to Low, but in vain. Yet her swift feminine instinct met the objection. "It's the mother's blood that would show," she murmured, "not this man's."

Recovering herself, she began to chafe his hands and temples, and moistened his lips with the spirit. When his respiration returned with a faint color to his cheeks, she pressed his hand eagerly and leaned over him.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Of what?" he whispered faintly.

"That Low is really your son?"

"Who said so?" he asked, opening his round eyes upon her.

"You did yourself, a moment ago," she said quickly. "Don't you remember?"

"Did I?"

"You did. Is it so?"

He smiled faintly. "I reckon."

She held her breath in expectation. But only the ludicrousness of the discovery seemed paramount to his weakened faculties. "Is n't it just about the ridiculousest thing all round?" he said, with a feeble chuckle. "First *you* nearly kill me before you know I am Low's father; then

I'm just spoilin' to kill him before I know he 's my son; then that god-forsaken fool Jack Brace mistakes you for Nellie, and Nellie for you. Ain't it just the biggest thing for the boys to get hold of? But we must keep it dark until after I marry Nellie, don't you see? Then we 'll have a good time all round, and I 'll stand the drinks. Think of it, Teresha! You don' know me, I do' know you, nobody knowsh anybody elsh. I try kill Lo'. Lo' wants kill Nellie. No thash no' ri— " But the potent liquor, overtaking his exhausted senses, thickened, impeded, and at last stopped his speech. His head slipped to her shoulder, and he became once more unconscious.

Teresa breathed again. In that brief moment she had abandoned herself to a wild inspiration of hope which she could scarcely define. Not that it was entirely a wild inspiration; she tried to reason calmly. What if she revealed the truth to him? What if she told the wretched man before her that she had deceived him; that she had overheard his conversation with Brace; that she had stolen Brace's horse to bring Low warning; that, failing to find Low in his accustomed haunts or at the camp-fire, she had left a note for him pinned to the herbarium, imploring him to fly with his companion from the danger that was coming; and that, remaining on watch, she had seen them both — Brace and Dunn — approaching, and had prepared to meet them at the cabin? Would this miserable and maddened man understand her self-abnegation? Would he forgive Low and Nellie? — she did not ask for herself. Or would the revelation turn his brain, if it did not kill him outright? She looked at the sunken orbits of his eyes and hectic on his cheek, and shuddered.

Why was this added to the agony she already suffered? She had been willing to stand between them with her life, her liberty, and even — the hot blood dyed her cheek at the thought — with the added shame of being thought the

cast-off mistress of that man's son. Yet all this she had taken upon herself in expiation of something — she knew not clearly what; no, for nothing — only for *him*. And yet this very situation offered her that gleam of hope which had thrilled her; a hope so wild in its improbability, so degrading in its possibility, that at first she knew not whether despair was not preferable to its shame. And yet was it unreasonable? She was no longer passionate; she would be calm and think it out fairly.

She would go to Low at once. She would find him somewhere — and even if with that girl, what mattered? — and she would tell him all. When he knew that the life and death of his father lay in the scale, would he let his brief, foolish passion for Nellie stand in the way? Even if he were not influenced by filial affection or mere compassion, would his pride let him stoop to a rivalry with the man who had deserted his youth? Could he take Dunn's promised bride, who must have coquetted with him to have brought him to this miserable plight? Was this like the calm, proud young god she knew? Yet she had an uneasy instinct that calm, proud young gods and goddesses did things like this, and felt the weakness of her reasoning flush her own conscious cheek.

"Teresa!"

She started. Dunn was awake, and was gazing at her curiously.

"I was reckoning it was the only square thing for Low to stop this promiscuous picnicking here and marry you out and out."

"Marry me!" said Teresa in a voice that, with all her efforts, she could not make cynical.

"Yes," he repeated, "after I 've married Nellie; tote you down to San Angeles, and there take my name like a man, and give it to you. Nobody 'll ask after *Teresa*, sure — you bet your life. And if they do, and he can't stop

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their jaw, just you call on the old man. It 's mighty queer, ain't it, Teresa, to think of you being my daughter-in-law ? "

It seemed here as if he was about to lapse again into unconsciousness over the purely ludicrous aspect of the subject, but he haply recovered his seriousness. " He 'll have as much money from me as he wants to go into business with. What 's his line of business, Teresa ? " asked this prospective father-in-law, in a large, liberal way.

" He is a botanist ! " said Teresa, with a sudden childish animation that seemed to keep up the grim humor of the paternal suggestion ; " and oh, he is too poor to buy books ! I sent for one or two for him myself the other day ! " — she hesitated — " it was all the money I had, but it was n't enough for him to go on with his studies."

Dunn looked at her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, and became thoughtful. " Curson must have been a d—d fool," he said finally.

Teresa remained silent. She was beginning to be impatient and uneasy, fearing some mischance that might delay her dreaded yet longed-for meeting with Low. Yet she could not leave this sick and exhausted man, *his father*, now bound to her by more than mere humanity.

" Could n't you manage," she said gently, " to lean on me a few steps further, until I could bring you to a cooler spot and nearer assistance ? "

He nodded. She lifted him almost like a child to his feet. A spasm of pain passed over his face. " How far is it ? "

" Not more than ten minutes," she replied.

" I can make a spurt for that time," he said coolly, and began to walk slowly but steadily on. Only his face, which was white and set, and the convulsive grip of his hand on her arm, betrayed the effort. At the end of ten minutes she stopped. They stood before the splintered,

lightning-scarred shaft in the opening of the woods, where Low had built her first camp-fire. She carefully picked up the herbarium, but her quick eye had already detected in the distance, before she had allowed Dunn to enter the opening with her, that her note was gone. Low had been there before them; he had been warned, as his absence from the cabin showed; he would not return there. They were free from interruption — but where had he gone?

The sick man drew a long breath of relief as she seated him in the clover-grown hollow where she had slept the second night of her stay. "It 's cooler than those cursed woods," he said. "I suppose it 's because it 's a little like a grave. What are you going to do now?" he added, as she brought a cup of water and placed it at his side.

"I 'm going to leave you here for a little while," she said cheerfully, but with a pale face and nervous hands. "I 'm going to leave you while I seek Low."

The sick man raised his head. "I 'm good for a spurt, Teresa, like that I 've just got through, but I don't think I 'm up to a family party. Could n't you issue cards later on?"

"You don't understand," she said. "I 'm going to get Low to send some one of your friends to you here. I don't think he 'll begrudge leaving *her* a moment for that," she added to herself bitterly.

"What 's that you 're saying?" he queried, with the nervous quickness of an invalid.

"Nothing — but that I 'm going now." She turned her face aside to hide her moistened eyes. "Wish me good luck, won't you?" she asked, half sadly, half pettishly.

"Come here!"

She came and bent over him. He suddenly raised his hands, and, drawing her face down to his own, kissed her forehead.

"Give that to *him*," he whispered, "from *me*."

She turned and fled, happily for her sentiment, not hearing the feeble laugh that followed, as Dunn, in sheer imbecility, again referred to the extravagant ludicrousness of the situation. "It is about the biggest thing in the way of a sell all round," he repeated, lying on his back, confidentially to the speck of smoke-obscured sky above him. He pictured himself repeating it, not to Nellie — her severe propriety might at last overlook the fact, but would not tolerate the joke — but to her father! It would be just one of those characteristic Californian jokes Father Wynn would admire.

To his exhaustion fever presently succeeded, and he began to grow restless. The heat, too, seemed to invade his retreat, and from time to time the little patch of blue sky was totally obscured by clouds of smoke. He amused himself with watching a lizard who was investigating a folded piece of paper, whose elasticity gave the little creature lively apprehensions of its vitality. At last he could stand the stillness of his retreat and his supine position no longer, and rolled himself out of the bed of leaves that Teresa had so carefully prepared for him. He rose to his feet stiff and sore, and, supporting himself by the nearest tree, moved a few steps from the dead ashes of the camp-fire. The movement frightened the lizard, who abandoned the paper and fled. With a satirical recollection of Brace and his "ridiculous" discovery through the medium of this animal, he stooped and picked up the paper. "Like as not," he said to himself with grim irony, "these yer lizards are in the discovery business. P'r'aps this may lead to another mystery;" and he began to unfold the paper with a smile. But the smile ceased as his eyes suddenly caught his own name.

A dozen lines were written in pencil on what seemed to be a blank leaf originally torn from some book. He

trembled so that he was obliged to sit down to read these words: —

When you get this, keep away from the woods. Dunn and another man are in deadly pursuit of you and your companion. I overheard their plan to surprise you in our cabin. *Don't go there*, and I will delay them and put them off the scent. Don't mind me. God bless you; and if you never see me again, think sometimes of

TERESA.

His trembling ceased; he did not start, but rose in an abstracted way, and made a few deliberate steps in the direction Teresa had gone. Even then he was so confused that he was obliged to refer to the paper again, but with so little effect that he could only repeat the last words, "think sometimes of Teresa." He was conscious that this was not all; he had a full conviction of being deceived, and knew that he held the proof in his hand, but he could not formulate it beyond that sentence. "Teresa" — yes, he would think of her. She would think of him. She would explain it. And here she was returning.

In that brief interval her face and manner had again changed. She was pale and quite breathless. She cast a swift glance at Dunn and the paper he mechanically held out, walked up to him, and tore it from his hand.

"Well," she said hoarsely, "what are you going to do about it?"

He attempted to speak, but his voice failed him. Even then he was conscious that if he had spoken he would have only repeated, "think sometimes of Teresa." He looked longingly but helplessly at the spot where she had thrown the paper, as if it had contained his unuttered words.

"Yes," she went on to herself, as if he was a mute, indifferent spectator — "yes, they 're gone. That ends it

all. The game 's played out. Well!" suddenly turning upon him, "now you know it all. Your Nellie *was* here with him, and is with him now. Do you hear? Make the most of it; you 've lost them — but here I am."

"Yes," he said eagerly — "yes, Teresa."

She stopped, stared at him; then taking him by the hand led him like a child back to his couch. "Well," she said, in half-savage explanation, "I told you the truth when I said the girl was n't at the cabin last night, and that I did n't know her. What are you glowerin' at? No! I have n't lied to you, I swear to God, except in one thing. Do you know what that was? To save him I took upon me a shame I don't deserve. I let you think I was his mistress. You think so now, don't you? Well, before God to-day — and He may take me when He likes — I 'm no more to him than a sister! I reckon your Nellie can't say as much."

She turned away, and with the quick, impatient stride of some caged animal made the narrow circuit of the opening, stopping a moment mechanically before the sick man, and again, without looking at him, continuing her monotonous round. The heat had become excessive, but she held her shawl with both hands drawn tightly over her shoulders. Suddenly a wood-duck darted out of the covert blindly into the opening, struck against the blasted trunk, fell half stunned near her feet, and then, recovering, fluttered away. She had scarcely completed another circuit before the irruption was followed by a whirring bevy of quail, a flight of jays, and a sudden tumult of wings swept through the wood like a tornado. She turned inquiringly to Dunn, who had risen to his feet, but the next moment she caught convulsively at his wrist: a wolf had just dashed through the underbrush not a dozen yards away, and on either side of them they could hear the scamper and rustle of hurrying feet like the outburst of a summer shower. A cold wind

arose from the opposite direction, as if to contest this wild exodus, but it was followed by a blast of sickening heat. Teresa sank at Dunn's feet in an agony of terror.

"Don't let them touch me!" she gasped; "keep them off! Tell me, for God's sake, what has happened!"

He laid his hand firmly on her arm, and lifted her in his turn to her feet like a child. In that supreme moment of physical danger, his strength, reason, and manhood returned in their plenitude of power. He pointed coolly to the trail she had quitted, and said: —

"The Carquinez Woods are on fire!"

CHAPTER X

THE nest of the tuneful Burnhams, although in the suburbs of Indian Spring, was not in ordinary weather and seasons hidden from the longing eyes of the youth of that settlement. That night, however, it was veiled in the smoke that encompassed the great highway leading to Excelsior. It is presumed that the Burnham brood had long since folded their wings, for there was no sign of life nor movement in the house as a rapidly driven horse and buggy pulled up before it. Fortunately, the paternal Burnham was an early bird, in the habit of picking up the first stirring mining worm, and a resounding knock brought him half dressed to the street door. He was startled at seeing Father Wynn before him, a trifle flushed and abstracted.

"Ah ha! up betimes, I see, and ready. No sluggards here — ha, ha!" he said heartily, slamming the door behind him, and by a series of pokes in the ribs genially backing his host into his own sitting-room. "I'm up, too, and am here to see Nellie. She's here, eh — of course?" he added, darting a quick look at Burnham.

But Mr. Burnham was one of those large, liberal Western husbands who classified his household under the general title of "woman folk," for the integers of which he was not responsible. He hesitated, and then propounded over the balusters to the upper story the direct query, "You don't happen to have Nellie Wynn up there, do ye?"

There was an interval of inquiry proceeding from half a dozen reluctant throats, more or less cottony and muffled, in those various degrees of grievance and mental

distress which indicate too early roused young womanhood. The eventual reply seemed to be affirmative, albeit accompanied with a suppressed giggle, as if the young lady had just been discovered as an answer to an amusing conundrum.

"All right," said Wynn, with an apparent accession of boisterous geniality. "Tell her I must see her, and I 've only got a few minutes to spare. Tell her to slip on anything and come down; there 's no one here but myself, and I 've shut the front door on Brother Burnham. Ha, ha!" and suiting the action to the word, he actually bundled the admiring Brother Burnham out on his own doorstep. There was a light pattering on the staircase, and Nellie Wynn, pink with sleep, very tall, very slim, hastily draped in a white counterpane with a blue border and a general classic suggestion, slipped into the parlor. At the same moment the father shut the door behind her, placed one hand on the knob, and with the other seized her wrist.

"Where were you yesterday?" he asked.

Nellie looked at him, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "Here."

"You were in the Carquinez Woods with Low Dorman; you went there in disguise; you 've met him there before. He is your clandestine lover; you have taken pledges of affection from him; you have" —

"Stop!" she said.

He stopped.

"Did he tell you this?" she asked, with an expression of disdain.

"No; I overheard it. Dunn and Brace were at the house waiting for you. When the coach did not bring you, I went to the office to inquire. As I left our door I thought I saw somebody listening at the parlor windows. It was only a drunken Mexican muleteer leaning against the

house; but if *he* heard nothing, *I* did. Nellie, I heard Brace tell Dunn that he had tracked you in your disguise to the woods — do you hear? that when you pretended to be here with the girls you were with Low — alone; that you wear a ring that Low got of a trader here; that there was a cabin in the woods" —

"Stop!" she repeated.

Wynn again paused.

"And what did *you* do?" she asked.

"I heard they were starting down there to surprise you and him together, and I harnessed up and got ahead of them in my buggy."

"And found me here," she said, looking full into his eyes.

He understood her and returned the look. He recognized the full importance of the culminating fact conveyed in her words, and was obliged to content himself with its logical and worldly significance. It was too late now to take her to task for mere filial disobedience; they must become allies.

"Yes," he said hurriedly; "but if you value your reputation, if you wish to silence both these men, answer me fully."

"Go on," she said.

"Did you go to the cabin in the woods yesterday?"

"No."

"Did you ever go there with Low?"

"No; I do not know even where it is."

Wynn felt that she was telling the truth. Nellie knew it; but as she would have been equally satisfied with an equally efficacious falsehood, her face remained unchanged.

"And when did he leave you?"

"At nine o'clock, here. He went to the hotel."

"He saved his life, then, for Dunn is on his way to the woods to kill him."

The jeopardy of her lover did not seem to affect the young girl with alarm, although her eyes betrayed some interest.

"Then Dunn has gone to the woods?" she said thoughtfully.

"He has," replied Wynn.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"I want to know what you are going to do?"

"I *was* going back to bed."

"This is no time for trifling, girl."

"I should think not," she said, with a yawn; "it 's too early or too late."

Wynn grasped her wrist more tightly. "Hear me! Put whatever face you like on this affair, you are compromised — and compromised with a man you can't marry."

"I don't know that I ever wanted to marry Low, if you mean him," she said quietly.

"And Dunn would n't marry you now."

"I 'm not so sure of that either."

"Nellie," said Wynn excitedly, "do you want to drive me mad? Have you nothing to say — nothing to suggest?"

"Oh, you want me to help you, do you? Why did n't you say that first? Well, go and bring Dunn here."

"Are you mad? The man has gone already in pursuit of your lover, believing you with him."

"Then he will the more readily come and talk with me without him. Will you take the invitation — yes or no?"

"Yes, but" —

"Enough. On your way there you will stop at the hotel and give Low a letter from me."

"Nellie!"

"You shall read it, of course," she said scornfully, "for it will be your text for the conversation you will have with him. Will you please take your hand from the lock and open the door?"

Wynn mechanically opened the door. The young girl flew upstairs. In a very few moments she returned with two notes: one contained a few lines of formal invitation to Dunn; the other read as follows: —

DEAR MR. DORMAN, — My father will tell you how deeply I regret that our recent botanical excursions in the Carquinez Woods have been a source of serious misapprehension to those who had a claim to my consideration, and that I shall be obliged to discontinue them for the future. At the same time he wishes me to express my gratitude for your valuable instruction and assistance in that pleasing study, even though approaching events may compel me to relinquish it for other duties. May I beg you to accept the inclosed ring as a slight recognition of my obligations to you?

Your grateful pupil,

NELLIE WYNN.

When he had finished reading the letter, she handed him a ring, which he took mechanically. He raised his eyes to hers with perfectly genuine admiration. "You 're a good girl, Nellie," he said, and, in a moment of parental forgetfulness, unconsciously advanced his lips towards her cheek. But she drew back in time to recall him to a sense of that human weakness.

"I suppose I 'll have time for a nap yet," she said, as a gentle hint to her embarrassed parent. He nodded, and turned towards the door.

"If I were you," she continued, repressing a yawn, "I 'd manage to be seen on good terms with Low at the hotel; so perhaps you need not give the letter to him until the last thing. Good-by."

The sitting-room door opened and closed behind her as she slipped upstairs, and her father, without the formality

of leave-taking, quietly let himself out by the front door.

When he drove into the highroad again, however, an overlooked possibility threatened for a moment to indefinitely postpone his amiable intentions regarding Low. The hotel was at the farther end of the settlement toward the Carquinez Woods, and as Wynn had nearly reached it he was recalled to himself by the sounds of hoofs and wheels rapidly approaching from the direction of the Excelsior turnpike. Wynn made no doubt it was the sheriff and Brace. To avoid recognition at that moment, he whipped up his horse, intending to keep the lead until he could turn into the first cross-road. But the coming travelers had the fleetest horse; and finding it impossible to distance them, he drove close to the ditch, pulling up suddenly as the strange vehicle was abreast of him, and forcing them to pass him at full speed, with the result already chronicled. When they had vanished in the darkness, Mr. Wynn, with a heart overflowing with Christian thankfulness and universal benevolence, wheeled round, and drove back to the hotel he had already passed. To pull up at the veranda with a stentorian shout, to thump loudly at the deserted bar, to hilariously beat the panels of the landlord's door, and commit a jocose assault and battery upon that half-dressed and half-awakened man, was eminently characteristic of Wynn, and part of his amiable plans that morning.

"Something to wash this wood smoke from my throat, Brother Carter, and about as much again to prop open your eyes," he said, dragging Carter before the bar, "and glasses round for as many of the boys as are up and stirring after a hard-working Christian's rest. How goes the honest publican's trade, and who have we here?"

"Thar 's Judge Robinson and two lawyers from Sacramento, Dick Curson over from Yolo," said Carter, "and that ar young Injin yarb doctor from the Carquinez Woods.

I reckon he 's jist up — I noticed a light under his door as I passed."

"He 's my man for a friendly chat before breakfast," said Wynn. "You need n't come up. I 'll find the way. I don't want a light; I reckon my eyes ain't as bright nor as young as his, but they 'll see almost as far in the dark — he-he!" And, nodding to Brother Carter, he strode along the passage, and with no other introduction than a playful and preliminary "Boo!" burst into one of the rooms. Low, who by the light of a single candle was bending over the plates of a large quarto, merely raised his eyes and looked at the intruder. The young man's natural imperturbability, always exasperating to Wynn, seemed accented that morning by contrast with his own over-acted animation.

"Ah ha! — wasting the midnight oil instead of imbibing the morning dews," said Father Wynn archly, illustrating his metaphor with a movement of his hand to his lips. "What have we here?"

"An anonymous gift," replied Low simply, recognizing the father of Nellie by rising from his chair. "It 's a volume I 've longed to possess, but never could afford to buy. I cannot imagine who sent it to me."

Wynn was for a moment startled by the thought that this recipient of valuable gifts might have influential friends. But a glance at the bare room, which looked like a camp, and the strange, unconventional garb of its occupant, restored his former convictions. There might be a promise of intelligence, but scarcely of prosperity, in the figure before him.

"Ah! We must not forget that we are watched over in the night season," he said, laying his hand on Low's shoulder, with an illustration of celestial guardianship that would have been impious but for its palpable grotesqueness. "No, sir, we know not what a day may bring forth."

Unfortunately, Low's practical mind did not go beyond

a mere human interpretation. It was enough, however, to put a new light in his eye and a faint color in his cheek.

"Could it have been Miss Nellie?" he asked, with half-boyish hesitation.

Mr. Wynn was too much of a Christian not to bow before what appeared to him the purely providential interposition of this suggestion. Seizing it and Low at the same moment, he playfully forced him down again in his chair.

"Ah, you rascal!" he said, with infinite archness; "that 's your game, is it? You want to trap poor Father Wynn. You want to make him say 'No.' You want to tempt him to commit himself. No, sir! — never, sir! — no, no!"

Firmly convinced that the present was Nellie's and that her father only good-humoredly guessed it, the young man's simple, truthful nature was embarrassed. He longed to express his gratitude, but feared to betray the young girl's trust. The Rev. Mr. Wynn speedily relieved his mind.

"No," he continued, bestriding a chair, and familiarly confronting Low over its back. "No, sir — no! And you want me to say 'No,' don't you, regarding the little walks of Nellie and a certain young man in the Carquinez Woods? — ha, ha! You 'd like me to say that I know nothing of the botanizings, and the herb collectings, and the picnickings there — he-he! — you sly dog! Perhaps you 'd like to tempt Father Wynn further, and make him swear he knows nothing of his daughter disguising herself in a duster and meeting another young man — is n't it another young man? — all alone, eh? Perhaps you want poor old Father Wynn to say 'No.' No, sir, nothing of the kind ever occurred. Ah, you young rascal!"

Slightly troubled, in spite of Wynn's hearty manner, Low, with his usual directness, however, said, "I do not want any one to deny that I have seen Miss Nellie."

"Certainly, certainly," said Wynn, abandoning his method, considerably disconcerted by Low's simplicity, and a certain natural reserve that shook off his familiarity. "Certainly it 's a noble thing to be able to put your hand on your heart and say to the world, 'Come on, all of you! Observe me; I have nothing to conceal. I walk with Miss Wynn in the woods as her instructor — her teacher, in fact. We cull a flower here and there; we pluck an herb fresh from the hand of the Creator. We look, so to speak, from Nature to Nature's God.' Yes, my young friend, we should be the first to repel the foul calumny that could misinterpret our most innocent actions."

"Calumny?" repeated Low, starting to his feet. "What calumny?"

"My friend, my noble young friend, I recognize your indignation. I know your worth. When I said to Nellie, my only child, my perhaps too simple offspring — a mere wildflower like yourself — when I said to her, 'Go, my child, walk in the woods with this young man, hand in hand. Let him instruct you from the humblest roots, for he has trodden in the ways of the Almighty. Gather wisdom from his lips, and knowledge from his simple woodsman's craft. Make, in fact, a collection not only of herbs, but of moral axioms and experience,' — I knew I could trust you, and, trusting you, my young friend, I felt I could trust the world. Perhaps I was weak, foolish. But I thought only of her welfare. I even recall how that, to preserve the purity of her garments, I bade her don a simple duster; that, to secure her from the trifling companionship of others, I bade her keep her own counsel, and seek you at seasons known but to yourselves."

"But — did Nellie — understand you?" interrupted Low hastily.

"I see you read her simple nature. Understand me? No, not at first! Her maidenly instinct — perhaps her

duty to another — took the alarm. I remember her words. 'But what will Dunn say?' she asked. 'Will he not be jealous?'"

"Dunn! jealous! I don't understand," said Low, fixing his eyes on Wynn.

"That's just what I said to Nellie. 'Jealous!' I said. 'What, Dunn, your affianced husband, jealous of a mere friend — a teacher, a guide, a philosopher. It is impossible.' Well, sir, she was right. He is jealous. And, more than that, he has imparted his jealousy to others! In other words, he has made a scandal!"

Low's eyes flashed. "Where is your daughter now?" he said sternly.

"At present in bed, suffering from a nervous attack brought on by these unjust suspicions. She appreciates your anxiety, and, knowing that you could not see her, told me to give you this." He handed Low the ring and the letter.

The climax had been forced, and, it must be confessed, was by no means the one Mr. Wynn had fully arranged in his own inner consciousness. He had intended to take an ostentatious leave of Low in the bar-room, deliver the letter with archness, and escape before a possible explosion. He consequently backed towards the door for an emergency. But he was again at fault. That unaffected stoical fortitude in acute suffering, which was the one remaining pride and glory of Low's race, was yet to be revealed to Wynn's civilized eyes.

The young man took the letter, and read it without changing a muscle, folded the ring in it, and dropped it into his haversack. Then he picked up his blanket, threw it over his shoulder, took his trusty rifle in his hand, and turned toward Wynn as if coldly surprised that he was still standing there.

"Are you —are you — going?" stammered Wynn.

"Are you *not?*" replied Low dryly, leaning on his rifle for a moment as if waiting for Wynn to precede him. The preacher looked at him a moment, mumbled something, and then shambled feebly and ineffectively down the staircase before Low, with a painful suggestion to the ordinary observer of being occasionally urged thereto by the moccasin of the young man behind him.

On reaching the lower hall, however, he endeavored to create a diversion in his favor by dashing into the bar-room and clapping the occupants on the back with indiscriminate playfulness. But here again he seemed to be disappointed. To his great discomfiture, a large man not only returned his salutation with powerful levity, but with equal playfulness seized him in his arms, and after an ingenious simulation of depositing him in the horse-trough set him down in affected amazement. "Bletht if I did n't think from the weight of your hand it wath my old friend, Thacramento Bill," said Curson apologetically, with a wink at the bystanders. "That 'th the way Bill alwayth uthed to tackle hith friendth, till he wath one day bounthed by a prithe-fighter in Frithco, whom he had mithtaken for a mithionary." As Mr. Curson's reputation was of a quality that made any form of apology from him instantly acceptable, the amused spectators made way for him as, recognizing Low, who was just leaving the hotel, he turned coolly from them and walked towards him.

"Halloo!" he said, extending his hand. "You 're the man I 'm waiting for. Did you get a book from the exthpreth offithe latht night?"

"I did. Why?"

"It 'th all right. Ath I 'm rethponthible for it, I only wanted to know."

"Did *you* send it?" asked Low, quickly fixing his eyes on his face.

"Well, not exactly *me*. But it 'th not worth making a

mythtery of it. Teretha gave me a commithion to buy it and thend it to you anonymouthly. That 'th a woman'th nonthenth, for how could thee get a retheipt for it?"

"Then it was *her* present," said Low gloomily.

"Of courthe. It wath n't mine, my boy. I 'd have thent you a Tharp'th rifle in plathe of that muthle-loader you carry, or thomething thenthible. But, I thay! what 'th up? You look ath if you had been running all night."

Low grasped his hand. "Thank you," he said hurriedly; "but it 's nothing. Only I must be back to the woods early. Good-by."

But Curson retained Low's hand in his own powerful grip. "I 'll go with you a bit further," he said. "In fact, I've got thomething to thay to you; only don't be in thuch a hurry; the woodth can wait till you get there." Quietly compelling Low to alter his own characteristic Indian stride to keep pace with his, he went on: "I don't mind thaying I rather cottoned to you from the time you acted like a white man — no offenthe — to Teretha. She thayth you were left when a child lying round, jutht ath promithcuouthly ath she wath; and if I can do anything towardth putting you on the trail of your people, I 'll do it. I know thome of the voyageurth who traded with the Cherokeeth, and your father wath one — was n't he?" He glanced at Low's utterly abstracted and immobile face. "I thay, you don't theem to take a hand in thith game, pardner. What 'th the row? Ith anything wrong over there?" and he pointed to the Carquinez Woods, which were just looming out of the morning horizon in the distance.

Low stopped. The last words of his companion seemed to recall him to himself. He raised his eyes automatically to the woods, and started.

"There *is* something wrong over there," he said breathlessly. "Look!"

"I thee nothing," said Curson, beginning to doubt Low's sanity; "nothing more than I thaw an hour ago."

"Look again. Don't you see that smoke rising straight up? It is n't blown over from the Divide; it 's new smoke! The fire is in the woods!"

"I reckon that 'th so," muttered Curson, shading his eyes with his hand. "But, hullo! wait a minute! We 'll get hortheth. I say!" he shouted, forgetting his lisp in his excitement, "stop!" But Low had already lowered his head and darted forward like an arrow.

In a few moments he had left not only his companion but the last straggling houses of the outskirts far behind him, and had struck out in a long, swinging trot for the disused "cut-off." Already he fancied he heard the note of clamor in Indian Spring, and thought he distinguished the sound of hurrying hoofs on the great highway. But the sunken trail hid it from his view. From the column of smoke now plainly visible in the growing morning light he tried to locate the scene of the conflagration. It was evidently not a fire advancing regularly from the outer skirt of the wood, communicated to it from the Divide: it was a local outburst near its centre. It was not in the direction of his cabin in the tree. There was no immediate danger to Teresa, unless fear drove her beyond the confines of the wood into the hands of those who might recognize her. The screaming of jays and ravens above his head quickened his speed, as it heralded the rapid advance of the flames; and the unexpected apparition of a bounding body, flattened and flying over the yellow plain, told him that even the secure retreat of the mountain wild-cat had been invaded. A sudden recollection of Teresa's uncontrollable terror that first night smote him with remorse, and redoubled his efforts. Alone in the track of these frantic and bewildered beasts, to what madness might she not be driven!

The sharp crack of a rifle from the highroad turned his

course momentarily in that direction. The smoke was curling lazily over the heads of a party of men in the road, while the huge bulk of a grizzly was disappearing in the distance. A battue of the escaping animals had commenced! In the bitterness of his heart he caught at the horrible suggestion, and resolved to save her from them or die with her there.

How fast he ran, or the time it took him to reach the woods, has never been known. Their outlines were already hidden when he entered them. To a sense less keen, a courage less desperate, and a purpose less unaltered than Low's, the wood would have been impenetrable. The central fire was still confined to the lofty treetops, but the downward rush of wind from time to time drove the smoke into the aisles in blinding and suffocating volumes. To simulate the creeping animals, and fall to the ground on hands and knees, feel his way through the underbrush when the smoke was densest, or take advantage of its momentary lifting, and without uncertainty, mistake, or hesitation glide from tree to tree in one undeviating course, was possible only to an experienced woodsman. To keep his reason and insight so clear as to be able in the midst of this bewildering confusion to shape that course so as to intersect the wild and unknown tract of an inexperienced, frightened wanderer belonged to Low, and to Low alone. He was making his way against the wind towards the fire. He had reasoned that she was either in comparative safety to windward of it, or he should meet her being driven towards him by it, or find her succumbed and fainting at its feet. To do this he must penetrate the burning belt, and then pass under the blazing dome. He was already upon it; he could see the falling fire dropping like rain or blown like gorgeous blossoms of the conflagration across his path. The space was lit up brilliantly. The vast shafts of dull copper cast no shadow below, but there was no sign nor

token of any human being. For a moment the young man was at fault. It was true this hidden heart of the forest bore no undergrowth; the cool matted carpet of the aisles seemed to quench the glowing fragments as they fell. Escape might be difficult, but not impossible; yet every moment was precious. He leaned against a tree, and sent his voice like a clarion before him: "Teresa!" There was no reply. He called again. A faint cry at his back from the trail he had just traversed made him turn. Only a few paces behind him, blinded and staggering, but following like a beaten and wounded animal, Teresa halted, knelt, clasped her hands, and dumbly held them out before her. "Teresa!" he cried again, and sprang to her side.

She caught him by the knees, and lifted her face imploringly to his.

"Say that again!" she cried passionately. "Tell me it was Teresa you called, and no other! You have come back for me! You would not let me die here alone!"

He lifted her tenderly in his arms, and cast a rapid glance around him. It might have been his fancy, but there seemed a dull glow in the direction he had come.

"You do not speak!" she said. "Tell me! You did not come here to seek her?"

"Whom?" he said quickly.

"Nellie!"

With a sharp cry he let her slip to the ground. All the pent-up agony, rage, and mortification of the last hour broke from him in that inarticulate outburst. Then, catching her hands again, he dragged her to his level.

"Hear me!" he cried, disregarding the whirling smoke and the fiery baptism that sprinkled them, — "hear me! If you value your life, if you value your soul, and if you do not want me to cast you to the beasts like Jezebel of old, never — never take that accursed name again upon

She caught him by the knees

wind and drifting smoke, and the cool spring sparkled and bubbled in the almost translucent air. He laid her down beside the water, and bathed her face and hands. As he did so his quick eye caught sight of a woman's handkerchief lying at the foot of the disrupted root. Dropping Teresa's hand, he walked towards it, and with the toe of his moccasin gave it one vigorous kick into the ooze at the overflow of the spring. He turned to Teresa, but she evidently had not noticed the act.

"Where are you?" she asked, with a smile.

Something in her movement struck him. He came towards her, and bending down looked into her face.

"Teresa! Good God! — look at me! What has happened?"

She raised her eyes to his. There was a slight film across them; the lids were blackened; the beautiful lashes gone forever!

"I see you a little now, I think," she said, with a smile, passing her hands vaguely over his face. "It must have happened when he fainted, and I had to drag him through the blazing brush; both my hands were full, and I could not cover my eyes."

"Drag whom?" said Low quickly.

"Why, Dunn."

"Dunn! He here?" said Low hoarsely.

"Yes; did n't you read the note I left on the herbarium? Did n't you come to the camp-fire?" she asked hurriedly, clasping his hands. "Tell me quickly!"

"No!"

"Then you were not there — then you did n't leave me to die?"

"No! I swear it, Teresa!" the stoicism that had upheld his own agony breaking down before her strong emotion.

"Thank God!" She threw her arms around him, and hid her aching eyes in his troubled breast.

"Tell me all, Teresa," he whispered in her listening ear. "Don't move; stay there, and tell me all."

With her face buried in his bosom, as if speaking to his heart alone, she told him part, but not all. With her eyes filled with tears, but a smile on her lips, radiant with new-found happiness, she told him how she had overheard the plans of Dunn and Brace, how she had stolen their conveyance to warn him in time. But here she stopped, dreading to say a word that would shatter the hopes she was building upon his sudden revulsion of feeling for Nellie. She could not bring herself to repeat their interview — that would come later, when they were safe and out of danger; now not even the secret of his birth must come between them with its distraction, to mar their perfect communion. She faltered that Dunn had fainted from weakness, and that she had dragged him out of danger. "He will never interfere with us — I mean," she said softly, "with *me* again. I can promise you that as well as if he had sworn it."

"Let him pass now," said Low; "that will come later on," he added, unconsciously repeating her thought in a tone that made her heart sick. "But tell me, Teresa, why did you go to Excelsior?"

She buried her head still deeper, as if to hide it. He felt her broken heart beat against his own; he was conscious of a depth of feeling her rival had never awakened in him. The possibility of Teresa loving him had never occurred to his simple nature. He bent his head and kissed her. She was frightened, and unloosed her clinging arms; but he retained her hand, and said, "We will leave this accursed place, and you shall go with me as you said you would; nor need you ever leave me, unless you wish it."

She could hear the beating of her own heart through his words; she longed to look at the eyes and lips that told her

this, and read the meaning his voice alone could not entirely convey. For the first time she felt the loss of her sight. She did not know that it was, in this moment of happiness, the last blessing vouchsafed to her miserable life.

A few moments of silence followed, broken only by the distant rumor of the conflagration and the crash of falling boughs. "It may be an hour yet," he whispered, "before the fire has swept a path for us to the road below. We are safe here, unless some sudden current should draw the fire down upon us. You are not frightened?" She pressed his hand; she was thinking of the pale face of Dunn, lying in the secure retreat she had purchased for him at such a sacrifice. Yet the possibility of danger to him now for a moment marred her present happiness and security. "You think the fire will not go north of where you found me?" she asked softly.

"I think not," he said; "but I will reconnoitre. Stay where you are."

They pressed hands, and parted. He leaped upon the slanting trunk, and ascended it rapidly. She waited in mute expectation.

There was a sudden movement of the root on which she sat, a deafening crash, and she was thrown forward on her face.

The vast bulk of the leaning tree, dislodged from its aerial support by the gradual sapping of the spring at its roots, or by the crumbling of the bark from the heat, had slipped, made a half revolution, and, falling, overbore the lesser trees in its path, and tore, in its resistless momentum, a broad opening to the underbrush.

With a cry to Low, Teresa staggered to her feet. There was an interval of hideous silence, but no reply. She called again. There was a sudden deepening roar, the blast of a fiery furnace swept through the opening, a thousand luminous points around her burst into fire, and in an instant she was lost in a whirlwind of smoke and flame! From the

onset of its fury to its culmination twenty minutes did not elapse; but in that interval a radius of two hundred yards around the hidden spring was swept of life and light and motion.

For the rest of that day and part of the night a pall of smoke hung above the scene of desolation. It lifted only towards the morning, when the moon, riding high, picked out in black and silver the shrunken and silent columns of those roofless vaults, shorn of base and capital. It flickered on the still, overflowing pool of the hidden spring, and shone upon the white face of Low, who, with a rootlet of the fallen tree holding him down like an arm across his breast, seemed to be sleeping peacefully in the sleeping water.

. . . . . .

Contemporaneous history touched him as briefly, but not as gently. "It is now definitely ascertained," said "The Slumgullion Mirror," "that Sheriff Dunn met his fate in the Carquinez Woods in the performance of his duty; that fearless man having received information of the concealment of a band of horse-thieves in their recesses. The desperadoes are presumed to have escaped, as the only remains found are those of two wretched tramps, one of whom is said to have been a Digger, who supported himself upon roots and herbs, and the other a degraded half-white woman. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the fire originated through their carelessness, although Father Wynn of the First Baptist Church, in his powerful discourse of last Sunday, pointed at the warning and lesson of such catastrophes. It may not be out of place here to say that the rumors regarding an engagement between the pastor's accomplished daughter and the late lamented sheriff are utterly without foundation, as it has been an *on dit* for some time in all well-informed circles that the indefatigable Mr. Brace, of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express, will shortly lead the lady to the hymeneal altar."

A BLUE GRASS PENELOPE

I

She was barely twenty-three years old. It is probable that up to that age, and the beginning of this episode, her life had been uneventful. Born to the easy mediocrity of such compensating extremes as a small farmhouse and large lands, a good position and no society, in that vast grazing district of Kentucky known as the "Blue Grass" region, all the possibilities of a Western American girl's existence lay before her. A piano in the bare-walled house, the latest patented mower in the limitless meadows, and a silk dress sweeping the rough floor of the unpainted "meeting-house," were already the promise of those possibilities. Beautiful she was, but the power of that beauty was limited by being equally shared with her few neighbors. There were small, narrow, arched feet besides her own that trod the uncarpeted floors of outlying log cabins with equal grace and dignity; bright, clearly opened eyes that were equally capable of looking unabashed upon princes and potentates, as a few later did, and the heiress of the county judge read her own beauty without envy in the frank glances and unlowered crest of the blacksmith's daughter. Eventually she had married the male of her species, a young stranger, who, as schoolmaster in the nearest town, had utilized to some local extent a scant capital of education. In obedience to the unwritten law of the West, after the marriage was celebrated the doors of the ancestral home cheerfully opened, and bride and bridegroom issued forth, without regret and without sentiment, to seek the further

possibilities of a life beyond these already too familiar voices. With their departure for California as Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Tucker, the parental nest in the Blue Grass meadows knew them no more.

They submitted with equal cheerfulness to the privations and excesses of their new conditions. Within three years the schoolmaster developed into a lawyer and capitalist, the Blue Grass bride supplying a grace and ease to these transitions that were all her own. She softened the abruptness of sudden wealth, mitigated the austerities of newly acquired power, and made the most glaring incongruity picturesque. Only one thing seemed to limit their progress in the region of these possibilities. They were childless. It was as if they had exhausted the future in their own youth, leaving little or nothing for another generation to do.

A southwesterly storm was beating against the dressing-room windows of their new house in one of the hilly suburbs of San Francisco, and threatening the unseasonable frivolity of the stucco ornamentation of cornice and balcony. Mrs. Tucker had been called from the contemplation of the dreary prospect without by the arrival of a visitor. On entering the drawing-room she found him engaged in a half-admiring, half-resentful examination of its new furniture and hangings. Mrs. Tucker at once recognized Mr. Calhoun Weaver, a former Blue Grass neighbor; with swift feminine intuition she also felt that his slight antagonism was likely to be transferred from her furniture to herself. Waiving it with the lazy amiability of Southern indifference, she welcomed him by the familiarity of a Christian name.

"I reckoned that mebbee you opined old Blue Grass friends would n't naturally hitch on to them fancy doin's," he said, glancing around the apartment to avoid her clear eyes, as if resolutely setting himself against the old charm

of her manner as he had against the more recent glory of her surroundings; "but I thought I 'd just drop in for the sake of old times."

"Why should n't you, Cal?" said Mrs. Tucker with a frank smile.

"Especially as I 'm going up to Sacramento to-night with some influential friends," he continued, with an ostentation calculated to resist the assumption of her charms and her furniture. "Senator Dyce of Kentucky, and his cousin Judge Briggs; perhaps you know 'em, or maybe Spencer — I mean Mr. Tucker — does."

"I reckon," said Mrs. Tucker smiling; "but tell me something about the boys and girls at Vineville, and about yourself. *You* 're looking well, and right smart too." She paused to give due emphasis to this latter recognition of a huge gold chain with which her visitor was somewhat ostentatiously trifling.

"I did n't know as you cared to hear anything about Blue Grass," he returned, a little abashed. "I 've been away from there some time myself," he added, his uneasy vanity taking fresh alarm at the faint suspicion of patronage on the part of his hostess. "They 're doin' well though; perhaps as well as some others."

"And you 're not married yet," continued Mrs. Tucker, oblivious of the innuendo. "Ah, Cal," she added archly, "I am afraid you are as fickle as ever. What poor girl in Vineville have you left pining?"

The simple face of the man before her flushed with foolish gratification at this old-fashioned, ambiguous flattery. "Now look yer, Belle," he said, chuckling, "if you 're talking of old times, and you think I bear malice agin Spencer, why" —

But Mrs. Tucker interrupted what might have been an inopportune sentimental retrospect with a finger of arch but languid warning. "That will do! I 'm dying to know all

about it, and you must stay to dinner and tell me. It 's right mean you can't see Spencer too; but he is n't back from Sacramento yet."

Grateful as a tête-à-tête with his old neighbor in her more prosperous surroundings would have been, if only for the sake of later gossiping about it, he felt it would be inconsistent with his pride and his assumption of present business. More than that, he was uneasily conscious that in Mrs. Tucker's simple and unaffected manner there was a greater superiority than he had ever noticed during their previous acquaintance. He would have felt kinder to her had she shown any "airs and graces," which he could have commented upon and forgiven. He stammered some vague excuse of preoccupation, yet lingered in the hope of saying something which, if not aggressively unpleasant, might at least transfer to her indolent serenity some of his own irritation. "I reckon," he said, as he moved hesitatingly toward the door, "that Spencer has made himself easy and secure in them business risks he 's taking. That 'ere Alameda ditch affair they 're talking so much about is a mighty big thing, rather *too* big if it ever got to falling back on him. But I suppose he 's accustomed to take risks?"

"Of course he is," said Mrs. Tucker gayly. "He married *me*."

The visitor smiled feebly, but was not equal to the opportunity offered for gallant repudiation. "But suppose *you* ain't accustomed to risks?"

"Why not? I married *him*," said Mrs. Tucker.

Mr. Calhoun Weaver was human, and succumbed to this last charming audacity. He broke into a noisy but genuine laugh, shook Mrs. Tucker's hand with effusion, said, "Now that 's regular Blue Grass and no mistake!" and retreated under cover of his hilarity. In the hall he made a rallying-stand to repeat confidentially to the servant who had overheard them, "Blue Grass all over, you bet your life," and,

opening the door, was apparently swallowed up in the tempest.

Mrs. Tucker's smile kept her lips until she had returned to her room, and even then languidly shone in her eyes for some minutes after, as she gazed abstractedly from her window on the storm-tossed bay in the distance. Perhaps some girlish vision of the peaceful Blue Grass plain momentarily usurped the prospect; but it is to be doubted if there was much romance in that retrospect, or that it was more interesting to her than the positive and sharply cut outlines of the practical life she now led. Howbeit she soon forgot this fancy in lazily watching a boat that, in the teeth of the gale, was beating round Alcatraz Island. Although at times a mere blank speck on the gray waste of foam, a closer scrutiny showed it to be one of those lateen-rigged Italian fishing-boats that so often flecked the distant bay. Lost in the sudden darkening of rain, or reappearing beneath the lifted curtain of the squall, she watched it weather the island, and then turn its laboring but persistent course toward the open channel. A rent in the Indian-inky sky, that showed the narrowing portals of the Golden Gate beyond, revealed unexpectedly, as the destination of the little craft, a tall ship that hitherto lay hidden in the mist of the Saucelito shore. As the distance lessened between boat and ship, they were again lost in the downward swoop of another squall. When it lifted, the ship was creeping under the headland towards the open sea, but the boat was gone. Mrs. Tucker in vain rubbed the pane with her handkerchief — it had vanished. Meanwhile the ship, as she neared the Gate, drew out from the protecting headland, stood outlined for a moment with spars and canvas hearsed in black against the lurid rent in the horizon, and then seemed to sink slowly into the heaving obscurity beyond. A sudden onset of rain against the windows obliterated the remaining prospect; the entrance of a servant completed the diversion.

"Captain Poindexter, ma'am!"

Mrs. Tucker lifted her pretty eyebrows interrogatively. Captain Poindexter was a legal friend of her husband, and had dined there frequently; nevertheless she asked, "Did you tell him Mr. Tucker was not at home?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Did he ask for *me?*"

"Yes, 'm."

"Tell him I'll be down directly."

Mrs. Tucker's quiet face did not betray the fact that this second visitor was even less interesting than the first. In her heart she did not like Captain Poindexter. With a clever woman's instinct, she had early detected the fact that he had a superior, stronger nature than her husband; as a loyal wife, she secretly resented the occasional unconscious exhibition of this fact on the part of his intimate friend in their familiar intercourse. Added to this slight jealousy there was a certain moral antagonism between herself and the captain which none but themselves knew. They were both philosophers, but Mrs. Tucker's serene and languid optimism would not tolerate the compassionate and kind-hearted pessimisms of the lawyer. "Knowing what Jack Poindexter does of human nature," her husband had once said, "it's mighty fine in him to be so kind and forgiving. You ought to like him better, Belle." "And qualify myself to be forgiven," said the lady pertly. "I don't see what you're driving at, Belle; I give it up," had responded the puzzled husband. Mrs. Tucker kissed his high but foolish forehead tenderly, and said, "I'm glad you don't, dear."

Meanwhile her second visitor had, like the first, employed the interval in a critical survey of the glories of the new furniture, but with apparently more compassion than resentment in his manner. Once only had his expression changed. Over the fireplace hung a large photograph of Mr. Spencer Tucker. It was retouched, refined, and ideal-

ized in the highest style of that polite and diplomatic art. As Captain Poindexter looked upon the fringed hazel eyes, the drooping raven mustache, the clustering ringlets, and the Byronic full throat and turned-down collar of his friend, a smile of exhausted humorous tolerance and affectionate impatience curved his lips. "Well, you *are* a fool, are n't you?" he apostrophized it half audibly.

He was standing before the picture as she entered. Even in the trying contiguity of that peerless work he would have been called a fine-looking man. As he advanced to greet her, it was evident that his military title was not one of the mere fanciful sobriquets of the locality. In his erect figure and the disciplined composure of limb and attitude there were still traces of the refined academic rigors of West Point. The pliant adaptability of Western civilization, which enabled him, three years before, to leave the army and transfer his executive ability to the more profitable profession of the law, had loosed sash and shoulder-strap, but had not entirely removed the restraint of the one, nor the bearing of the other.

"Spencer is in Sacramento," began Mrs. Tucker in languid explanation, after the first greetings were over.

"I knew he was not here," replied Captain Poindexter gently, as he drew the proffered chair towards her, "but this is business that concerns you both." He stopped and glanced upwards at the picture. "I suppose you know nothing of his business? Of course not," he added reassuringly, "nothing, absolutely nothing, certainly." He said this so kindly, and yet so positively, as if to promptly dispose of that question before going further, that she assented mechanically. "Well, then, he 's taken some big risks in the way of business, and — well, things have gone bad with him, you know. Very bad! Really, they could n't be worse! Of course it was dreadfully rash and all that," he went on, as if commenting upon the amusing wayward-

ness of a child; "but the result is the usual smash-up of everything, money, credit, and all!" He laughed, and added, "Yes, he 's got cut off — mules and baggage regularly routed and dispersed! I 'm in earnest." He raised his eyebrows and frowned slightly, as if to deprecate any corresponding hilarity on the part of Mrs. Tucker, or any attempt to make *too* light of the subject, and then rising, placed his hands behind his back, beamed half humorously upon her from beneath her husband's picture, and repeated, "That 's so."

Mrs. Tucker instinctively knew that he spoke the truth, and that it was impossible for him to convey it in any other than his natural manner; but between the shock and the singular influence of that manner she could at first only say, "You don't mean it!" fully conscious of the utter inanity of the remark, and that it seemed scarcely less cold-blooded than his own.

Poindexter, still smiling, nodded.

She arose with an effort. She had recovered from the first shock, and pride lent her a determined calmness that more than equaled Poindexter's easy philosophy.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"At sea, and I hope by this time where he cannot be found or followed."

Was her momentary glimpse of the outgoing ship a coincidence or only a vision? She was confused and giddy, but, mastering her weakness, she managed to continue in a lower voice: —

"You have no message for me from him? He told you nothing to tell me?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," replied Poindexter. "It was as much as he could do, I reckon, to get fairly away before the crash came."

"Then you did not see him go?"

"Well, no," said Poindexter. "I 'd hardly have man-

aged things in this way." He checked himself, and added, with a forgiving smile, "But he was the best judge of what he needed, of course."

"I suppose I will hear from him," she said quietly, "as soon as he is safe. He must have had enough else to think about, poor fellow."

She said this so naturally and quietly that Poindexter was deceived. He had no idea that the collected woman before him was thinking only of solitude and darkness, of her own room, and madly longing to be there. He said, "Yes, I dare say," in quite another voice, and glanced at the picture. But as she remained standing, he continued more earnestly, "I did n't come here to tell you what you might read in the newspapers to-morrow morning, and what everybody might tell you. Before that time I want you to do something to save a fragment of your property from the ruin; do you understand? I want you to make a rally, and bring off something in good order."

"For him?" said Mrs. Tucker, with brightening eyes.

"Well, yes, of course — if you like — but as if for yourself. Do you know the Rancho de los Cuervos?"

"I do."

"It 's almost the only bit of real property your husband has n't sold, mortgaged, or pledged. Why it was exempt, or whether only forgotten, I can't say."

"I 'll tell you why," said Mrs. Tucker, with a slight return of color. "It was the first land we ever bought, and Spencer always said it should be mine, and he would build a new house on it."

Captain Poindexter smiled and nodded at the picture. "Oh, he did say that, did he? Well, *that* 's evidence. But you see he never gave you the deed, and by sunrise to-morrow his creditors will attach it — unless" —

"Unless" — repeated Mrs. Tucker, with kindling eyes.

"Unless," continued Captain Poindexter, "they happen to find *you* in possession."

"I'll go," said Mrs. Tucker.

"Of course you will," returned Poindexter pleasantly. "Only, as it 's a big contract to take, suppose we see how you can fill it. It 's forty miles to Los Cuervos, and you can't trust yourself to steamboat or stage-coach. The steamboat left an hour ago."

"If I had only known this then!" ejaculated Mrs. Tucker.

"*I* knew it, but you had company then," said Poindexter, with ironical gallantry, "and I would n't disturb you." Without saying how he knew it, he continued, "In the stage-coach you might be recognized. You must go in a private conveyance and alone; even I cannot go with you, for I must go on before and meet you there. Can you drive forty miles?"

Mrs. Tucker lifted up her abstracted pretty lids. "I once drove fifty — at home," she returned simply.

"Good! And I dare say you did it then for fun. Do it now for something real and personal, as we lawyers say. You will have relays and a plan of the road. It 's rough weather for a pasear, but all the better for that. You 'll have less company on the road."

"How soon can I go?" she asked.

"The sooner the better. I 've arranged everything for you already," he continued with a laugh. "Come now, that 's a compliment to you, is n't it?" He smiled a moment in her steadfast, earnest face, and then said more gravely, "You 'll do. Now listen."

He then carefully detailed his plan. There was so little of excitement or mystery in their manner that the servant, who returned to light the gas, never knew that the ruin and bankruptcy of the house was being told before her, or that its mistress was planning her secret flight.

"Good-afternoon. I will see you to-morrow then," said Poindexter, raising his eyes to hers as the servant opened the door for him.

"Good-afternoon," repeated Mrs. Tucker, quietly answering his look. "You need not light the gas in my room, Mary," she continued in the same tone of voice as the door closed upon him; "I shall lie down for a few moments, and then I may run over to the Robinsons for the evening."

She regained her room composedly. The longing desire to bury her head in her pillow and "think out" her position had gone. She did not apostrophize her fate, she did not weep; few real women do in the access of calamity, or when there is anything else to be done. She felt that she knew it all; she believed she had sounded the profoundest depths of the disaster, and seemed already so old in her experience that she almost fancied she had been prepared for it. Perhaps she did not fully appreciate it. To a life like hers it was only an incident, the mere turning of a page of the illimitable book of youth; the breaking up of what she now felt had become a monotony. In fact, she was not quite sure she had ever been satisfied with their present success. Had it brought her all she expected? She wanted to say this to her husband, not only to comfort him, poor fellow, but that they might come to a better understanding of life in the future. She was not perhaps different from other loving women, who, believing in this unattainable goal of matrimony, have sought it in the various episodes of fortune or reverses, in the bearing of children, or the loss of friends. In her childless experience there was no other life that had taken root in her circumstances and might suffer transplantation; only she and her husband could lose or profit by the change. The "better" understanding would come under other conditions than these.

She would have gone superstitiously to the window to gaze in the direction of the vanished ship, but another instinct restrained her. She would put aside all yearning for him until she had done something to help him, and earned

the confidence he seemed to have withheld. Perhaps it was pride — perhaps she never really believed his exodus was distant or complete.

With a full knowledge that to-morrow the various ornaments and pretty trifles around her would be in the hands of the law, she gathered only a few necessaries for her flight and some familiar personal trinkets. I am constrained to say that this self-abnegation was more fastidious than moral. She had no more idea of the ethics of bankruptcy than any other charming woman; she simply did not like to take with her any contagious memory of the chapter of the life just closing. She glanced around the home she was leaving without a lingering regret; there was no sentiment of tradition or custom that might be destroyed; her roots lay too near the surface to suffer dislocation; the happiness of her childless union had depended upon no domestic centre, nor was its flame sacred to any local hearthstone. It was without a sigh that, when night had fully fallen, she slipped unnoticed down the staircase. At the door of the drawing-room she paused, and then entered with the first guilty feeling of shame she had known that evening. Looking stealthily around, she mounted a chair before her husband's picture, kissed the irreproachable mustache hurriedly, said, "You foolish darling, you!" and slipped out agan. With this touching indorsement of the views of a rival philosopher, she closed the door softly, and left her home forever.

II

The wind and rain had cleared the unfrequented suburb of any observant lounger, and the darkness, lit only by far-spaced, gusty lamps, hid her hastening figure. She had barely crossed the second street when she heard the quick clatter of hoofs behind her; a buggy drove up to the curb-

stone, and Poindexter leaped out. She entered quickly, but for a moment he still held the reins of the impatient horse. "He 's rather fresh," he said, eyeing her keenly; "are you sure you can manage him?"

"Give me the reins," she said simply.

He placed them in the two firm, well-shaped hands that reached from the depths of the vehicle, and was satisfied. Yet he lingered.

"It 's rough work for a lone woman," he said almost curtly. "*I* can't go with you, but, speak frankly, is there any man you know whom you can trust well enough to take? It 's not too late yet; think a moment!"

He paused over the buttoning of the leather apron of the vehicle.

"No, there is none," answered the voice from the interior; "and it 's better so. Is all ready?"

"One moment more." He had recovered his half-bantering manner. "You *have* a friend and countryman already with you, do you know? Your horse is Blue Grass. Good-night."

With these words ringing in her ears she began her journey. The horse, as if eager to maintain the reputation which his native district had given his race, as well as the race of the pretty woman behind him, leaped impatiently forward. But pulled together by the fine and firm fingers that seemed to guide rather than check his exuberance, he presently struck into the long, swinging pace of his kind, and kept it throughout without "break" or acceleration. Over the paved streets the light buggy rattled, and the slender shafts danced around his smooth barrel; but when they touched the level highroad, horse and vehicle slipped forward through the night, a swift and noiseless phantom. Mrs. Tucker could see his graceful back dimly rising and falling before her with tireless rhythm, and could feel the intelligent pressure of his mouth, until it seemed the respon-

sive grasp of a powerful but kindly hand. The faint glow of conquest came to her cold cheek; the slight stirrings of pride moved her preoccupied heart. A soft light filled her hazel eyes. A desolate woman, bereft of husband and home, and flying through storm and night, she knew not where, she still leaned forward towards her horse. "Was he Blue Grass, then, dear old boy?" she gently cooed at him in the darkness. He evidently *was*, and responded by blowing her an ostentatious equine kiss. "And he would be good to his own forsaken Belle," she murmured caressingly, "and would n't let any one harm her?" But here, overcome by the lazy witchery of her voice, he shook his head so violently that Mrs. Tucker, after the fashion of her sex, had the double satisfaction of demurely restraining the passion she had evoked.

To avoid the more traveled thoroughfare, while the evening was still early, it had been arranged that she should at first take a less direct but less frequented road. This was a famous pleasure-drive from San Francisco, a graveled and sanded stretch of eight miles to the sea, and an ultimate "cocktail," in a "stately pleasure-dome decreed" among the surf and rocks of the Pacific shore. It was deserted now, and left to the unobstructed sweep of the wind and rain. Mrs. Tucker would not have chosen this road. With the instinctive jealousy of a bucolic inland race born by great rivers, she did not like the sea; and again, the dim and dreary waste tended to recall the vision connected with her husband's flight, upon which she had resolutely shut her eyes. But when she had reached it the road suddenly turned, following the trend of the beach, and she was exposed to the full power of its dread fascinations. The combined roar of sea and shore was in her ears. As the direct force of the gale had compelled her to furl the protecting hood of the buggy to keep the light vehicle from oversetting or drifting to leeward, she could no longer shut out the

heaving chaos on the right, from which the pallid ghosts of dead and dying breakers dimly rose and sank as if in awful salutation. At times through the darkness a white sheet appeared spread before the path and beneath the wheels of the buggy, which, when withdrawn with a reluctant hiss, seemed striving to drag the exhausted beach seaward with it. But the blind terror of her horse, who swerved at every sweep of the surge, shamed her own half-superstitious fears, and with the effort to control his alarm she regained her own self-possession, albeit with eyelashes wet not altogether with the salt spray from the sea. This was followed by a reaction, perhaps stimulated by her victory over the beaten animal, when for a time, she knew not how long, she felt only a mad sense of freedom and power, oblivious of even her sorrows, her lost home and husband, and with intense feminine consciousness she longed to be a man. She was scarcely aware that the track turned again inland until the beat of the horse's hoofs on the firm ground and an acceleration of speed showed her she had left the beach and the mysterious sea behind her, and she remembered that she was near the end of the first stage of her journey. Half an hour later the twinkling lights of the roadside inn where she was to change horses rose out of the darkness.

Happily for her, the hostler considered the horse, who had a local reputation, of more importance than the unknown muffled figure in the shadow of the unfurled hood, and confined his attention to the animal. After a careful examination of his feet and a few comments addressed solely to the superior creation, he led him away. Mrs. Tucker would have liked to part more affectionately from her four-footed compatriot, and felt a sudden sense of loneliness at the loss of her new friend, but a recollection of certain cautions of Captain Poindexter's kept her mute. Nevertheless, the hostler's ostentatious adjuration of "Now

then, are n't you going to bring out that mustang for the señora ? " puzzled her. It was not until the fresh horse was put to, and she had flung a piece of gold into the attendant's hand, that the " Gracias " of his unmistakable Saxon speech revealed to her the reason of the lawyer's caution. Poindexter had evidently represented her to these people as a native Californian who did not speak English. In her inconsistency her blood took fire at this first suggestion of deceit, and burned in her face. Why should he try to pass her off as anybody else ? Why should she not use her own, her husband's name ? She stopped and bit her lip.

It was but the beginning of an uneasy train of thought. She suddenly found herself thinking of her visitor, Calhoun Weaver, and not pleasantly. He would hear of their ruin to-morrow, perhaps of her own flight. He would remember his visit, and what would he think of her deceitful frivolity ? Would he believe that she was then ignorant of the failure ? It was her first sense of any accountability to others than herself, but even then it was rather owing to an uneasy consciousness of what her husband must feel if he were subjected to the criticisms of men like Calhoun. She wondered if others knew that he had kept her in ignorance of his flight. Did Poindexter know it, or had he only entrapped her into the admission ? Why had she not been clever enough to make him think that she knew it already ? For the moment she hated Poindexter for sharing that secret. Yet this was again followed by a new impatience of her husband's want of insight into her ability to help him. Of course the poor fellow could not bear to worry her, could not bear to face such men as Calhoun, or even Poindexter (she added exultingly to herself), but he might have sent her a line as he fled, only to prepare her to meet and combat the shame alone. It did not occur to her unsophisticated singleness of nature that she

was accepting as an error of feeling what the world would call cowardly selfishness.

At midnight the storm lulled, and a few stars trembled through the rent clouds. Her eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and her country instincts, a little overlaid by the urban experiences of the last few years, came again to the surface. She felt the fresh, cool radiation from outlying, upturned fields, the faint, sad odors from dim stretches of pricking grain and quickening leaf, and wondered if at Los Cuervos it might be possible to reproduce the peculiar verdure of her native district. She beguiled her fancy by an ambitious plan of retrieving their fortunes by farming; her comfortable tastes had lately rebelled against the homeless mechanical cultivation of those desolate but teeming Californian acres, and for a moment indulged in a vision of a vine-clad cottage home that in any other woman would have been sentimental. Her cramped limbs aching, she took advantage of the security of the darkness and the familiar contiguity of the fields to get down from the vehicle, gather her skirts together, and run at the head of the mustang, until her chill blood was thawed, night drawing a modest veil over this charming revelation of the nymph and woman. But the sudden shadow of a coyote checked the scouring feet of this swift Camilla, and sent her back precipitately to the buggy. Nevertheless, she was refreshed and able to pursue her journey, until the cold gray of early morning found her at the end of her second stage.

Her route was changed again from the main highway, rendered dangerous by the approach of day and the contiguity of the neighboring rancheros. The road was rough and hilly, her new horse and vehicle in keeping with the rudeness of the route — by far the most difficult of her whole journey. The rare wagon tracks that indicated her road were often scarcely discernible; at times they led

her through openings in the half-cleared woods, skirted suspicious morasses, painfully climbed the smooth, dome-like hills, or wound along perilous slopes at a dangerous angle. Twice she had to alight and cling to the sliding wheels on one of those treacherous inclines, or drag them from impending ruts or immovable mire. In the growing light she could distinguish the distant, low-lying marshes eaten by encroaching sloughs and insidious channels, and beyond them the faint gray waste of the lower bay. A darker peninsula in the marsh she knew to be the extreme boundary of her future home: the Rancho de los Cuervos. In another hour she began to descend to the plain, and once more to approach the main road, which now ran nearly parallel with her track. She scanned it cautiously for any early traveler! it stretched north and south in apparent unending solitude. She struck into it boldly, and urged her horse to the top of his speed, until she reached the cross-road that led to the rancho. But here she paused and allowed the reins to drop idly on the mustang's back. A singular and unaccountable irresolution seized her. The difficulties of her journey were over; the rancho lay scarcely two miles away; she had achieved the most important part of her task in the appointed time; but she hesitated. What had she come for? She tried to recall Poindexter's words, even her own enthusiasm, but in vain. She was going to take possession of her husband's property, she knew, that was all. But the means she had taken seemed now so exaggerated and mysterious for that simple end, that she began to dread an impending something, or some vague danger she had not considered, that she was rushing blindly to meet. Full of this strange feeling, she almost mechanically stopped her horse as she entered the cross-road.

From this momentary hesitation a singular sound aroused her. It seemed at first like the swift hurrying by of some viewless courier of the air, the vague alarm of some invisi-

ble flying herald, or like the inarticulate cry that precedes a storm. It seemed to rise and fall around her as if with some changing urgency of purpose. Raising her eyes, she suddenly recognized the two far-stretching lines of telegraph wire above her head, and knew the æolian cry of the morning wind along its vibrating chords. But it brought another and more practical fear to her active brain. Perhaps even now the telegraph might be anticipating her! Had Poindexter thought of that? She hesitated no longer, but laying the whip on the back of her jaded mustang, again hurried forward.

As the level horizon grew more distinct, her attention was attracted by the white sail of a small boat lazily threading the sinuous channel of the slough. It might be Poindexter arriving by the more direct route from the steamboat that occasionally laid off the ancient embarcadero of the Los Cuervos Rancho. But even while watching it her quick ear caught the sound of galloping hoofs behind her. She turned quickly and saw she was followed by a horseman. But her momentary alarm was succeeded by a feeling of relief as she recognized the erect figure and square shoulders of Poindexter. Yet she could not help thinking that he looked more like a militant scout, and less like a cautious legal adviser, than ever.

With unaffected womanliness she rearranged her slightly disordered hair as he drew up beside her. "I thought you were in yonder boat," she said.

"Not I," he laughed; "I distanced you by the high-road two hours, and have been reconnoitring, until I saw you hesitate at the cross-roads."

"But who is in the boat?" asked Mrs. Tucker, partly to hide her embarrassment.

"Only some early Chinese market gardener, I dare say. But you are safe now. Your are on your own land. You passed the boundary monument of the rancho five minutes

ago. Look! All you see before you is yours from the embarcadero to yonder Coast Range."

The tone of half raillery did not, however, cheer Mrs. Tucker. She shuddered slightly, and cast her eyes over the monotonous sea of tule and meadow.

"It does n't look pretty, perhaps," continued Poindexter, "but it 's the richest land in the State, and the embarcadero will some day be a town. I suppose you 'll call it Blue Grassville. But you seem tired!" he said, suddenly dropping his voice to a tone of half-humorous sympathy.

Mrs. Tucker managed to get rid of an impending tear under the pretense of clearing her eyes. "Are we nearly there?" she asked.

"Nearly. You know," he added, with the same half-mischievous, half-sympathizing gayety, "it 's not exactly a palace you 're coming to, — hardly. It 's the old casa that has been deserted for years, but I thought it better you should go into possession there than take up your abode at the shanty where your husband's farm-hands are. No one will know when you take possession of the casa, while the very hour of your arrival at the shanty would be known; and if they should make any trouble" —

"If they should make any trouble?" repeated Mrs. Tucker, lifting her frank, inquiring eyes to Poindexter.

His horse suddenly rearing from an apparently accidental prick of the spur, it was a minute or two before he was able to explain. "I mean if this ever comes up as a matter of evidence, you know. But here we are!"

What had seemed to be an overgrown mound rising like an island out of the dead level of the grassy sea now resolved itself into a collection of adobe walls, eaten and incrusted with shrubs and vines, that bore some resemblance to the usual uninhabited-looking exterior of a Spanish-American dwelling. Apertures that might have been lance-shaped windows or only cracks and fissures in

the walls were choked up with weeds and grass, and gave no passing glimpse of the interior. Entering a ruinous corral they came to a second entrance, which proved to be the patio or courtyard. The deserted wooden corridor, with beams, rafters, and floors whitened by the sun and wind, contained a few withered leaves, dryly rotting skins, and thongs of leather, as if undisturbed by human care. But among these scattered débris of former life and habitation there was no noisome or unclean suggestion of decay. A faint spiced odor of desiccation filled the bare walls. There was no slime on stone or sun-dried brick. In place of fungus or discolored moisture the dust of efflorescence whitened in the obscured corners. The elements had picked clean the bones of the old and crumbling tenement ere they should finally absorb it.

A withered old peon woman, who in dress, complexion, and fibrous hair might have been an animated fragment of the débris, rustled out of a low vaulted passage and welcomed them with a feeble crepitation. Following her into the dim interior, Mrs. Tucker was surprised to find some slight attempt at comfort and even adornment in the two or three habitable apartments. They were scrupulously clean and dry, two qualities which in her feminine eyes atoned for poverty of material.

"I could not send anything from San Bruno, the nearest village, without attracting attention," explained Poindexter; "but if you can manage to picnic here for a day longer, I 'll get one of our Chinese friends here," he pointed to the slough, "to bring over, for his return cargo from across the bay, any necessaries you may want. There is no danger of his betraying you," he added, with an ironical smile; "Chinamen and Indians are, by an ingenious provision of the statute of California, incapable of giving evidence against a white person. You can trust your handmaiden perfectly — even if she can't trust *you*. That

is your sacred privilege under the constitution. And now, as I expect to catch the up boat ten miles from hence, I must say 'good-by' until to-morrow night. I hope to bring you then some more definite plans for the future. The worst is over." He held her hand for a moment, and with a graver voice continued, "You have done it very well — do you know — very well!"

In the slight embarrassment produced by his sudden change of manner she felt that her thanks seemed awkward and restrained. "Don't thank me," he laughed, with a prompt return of his former levity; "that 's my trade. I only advised. You have saved yourself like a plucky woman — shall I say like Blue Grass? Good-by!" He mounted his horse, but, as if struck by an after-thought, wheeled and drew up by her side again. "If I were you I would n't see many strangers for a day or two, and listen to as little news as a woman possibly can." He laughed again, waved her a half-gallant, half-military salute, and was gone. The question she had been trying to frame, regarding the probability of communication with her husband, remained unasked. At least she had saved her pride before him.

Addressing herself to the care of her narrow household, she mechanically put away the few things she had brought with her, and began to readjust the scant furniture. She was a little discomposed at first at the absence of bolts, locks, and even window-fastenings until assured, by Concha's evident inability to comprehend her concern, that they were quite unknown at Los Cuervos. Her slight knowledge of Spanish was barely sufficient to make her wants known, so that the relief of conversation with her only companion was debarred her, and she was obliged to content herself with the sapless, crackling smiles and withered genuflexions that the old woman dropped like dead leaves in her path. It was staring noon when, the house singing like an empty

shell in the monotonous wind, she felt she could stand the solitude no longer, and, crossing the glaring patio and whistling corridor, made her way to the open gateway.

But the view without seemed to intensify her desolation. The broad expanse of the shadowless plain reached apparently to the Coast Range, trackless and unbroken save by one or two clusters of dwarfed oaks, which at that distance were but mossy excrescences on the surface, barely raised above the dead level. On the other side the marsh took up the monotony and carried it, scarcely interrupted by undefined water-courses, to the faintly marked-out horizon line of the remote bay. Scattered and apparently motionless black spots on the meadows that gave a dreary significance to the title of "The Crows" which the rancho bore, and sudden gray clouds of sandpipers on the marshes, that rose and vanished down the wind, were the only signs of life. Even the white sail of the early morning was gone.

She stood there until the aching of her straining eyes and the stiffening of her limbs in the cold wind compelled her to seek the sheltered warmth of the courtyard. Here she endeavored to make friends with a bright-eyed lizard, who was sunning himself in the corridor; a graceful little creature in blue and gold, from whom she felt at other times she might have fled, but whose beauty and harmlessness solitude had made known to her. With misplaced kindness she tempted it with bread-crumbs, with no other effect than to stiffen it into stony astonishment. She wondered if she should become like the prisoners she had read of in books, who poured out their solitary affections on noisome creatures, and she regretted even the mustang, which with the buggy had disappeared under the charge of some unknown retainer on her arrival. Was she not a prisoner? The shutterless windows, yawning doors, and open gate refuted the suggestion, but the encompassing solitude and trackless waste still held her captive. Poindexter had told her it was four miles

to the shanty; she might walk there. Why had she given her word that she would remain at the rancho until he returned?

The long day crept monotonously away, and she welcomed the night which shut out the dreary prospect. But it brought no cessation of the harassing wind without, nor surcease of the nervous irritation its perpetual and even activity wrought upon her. It haunted her pillow even in her exhausted sleep, and seemed to impatiently beckon her to rise and follow it. It brought her feverish dreams of her husband, footsore and weary, staggering forward under its pitiless lash and clamorous outcry; she would have gone to his assistance, but when she reached his side and held out her arms to him it hurried her past with merciless power, and, bearing her away, left him hopelessly behind. It was broad day when she awoke. The usual night showers of the waning rainy season had left no trace in sky or meadow; the fervid morning sun had already dried the patio; only the restless, harrying wind remained.

Mrs. Tucker arose with a resolve. She had learned from Concha on the previous evening that a part of the shanty was used as a tienda or shop for the laborers and rancheros. Under the necessity of purchasing some articles, she would go there and for a moment mingle with those people, who would not recognize her. Even if they did, her instinct told her it would be less to be feared than the hopeless uncertainty of another day. As she left the house the wind seemed to seize her as in her dream, and hurry her along with it, until in a few moments the walls of the low casa sank into the earth again, and she was alone but for the breeze on the solitary plain. The level distance glittered in the sharp light, a few crows with slant wings dipped and ran down the wind before her, and a passing gleam on the marsh was explained by the far-off cry of a curlew.

She had walked for an hour, upheld by the stimulus of

light and morning air, when the cluster of scrub oaks, which was her destination, opened enough to show two rambling sheds, before one of which was a wooden platform containing a few barrels and bones. As she approached nearer, she could see that one or two horses were tethered under the trees, that their riders were lounging by a horse-trough, and that over an open door the word "Tienda" was rudely painted on a board, and as rudely illustrated by the wares displayed at door and window. Accustomed as she was to the poverty of frontier architecture, even the crumbling walls of the old hacienda she had just left seemed picturesque to the rigid angles of the thin, blank, unpainted shell before her.

One of the loungers, who was reading a newspaper aloud as she advanced, put it aside and stared at her; there was an evident commotion in the shop as she stepped upon the platform, and when she entered, with breathless lips and beating heart, she found herself the object of a dozen curious eyes. Her quick pride resented the scrutiny and recalled her courage, and it was with a slight coldness in her usual lazy indifference that she leaned over the counter and asked for the articles she wanted.

The request was followed by a dead silence. Mrs. Tucker repeated it with some hauteur.

"I reckon you don't seem to know this store is in the hands of the sheriff," said one of the loungers.

Mrs. Tucker was not aware of it.

"Well, I don't know any one who 's a better right to know than Spence Tucker's wife," said another with a coarse laugh. The laugh was echoed by the others. Mrs. Tucker saw the pit into which she had deliberately walked, but did not flinch.

"Is there any one to serve here?" she asked, turning her clear eyes full upon the bystanders.

"You 'd better ask the sheriff. He was the last one to

sarve here. He sarved an attachment," replied the inevitable humorist of all Californian assemblages.

"Is he here?" asked Mrs. Tucker, disregarding the renewed laughter which followed this subtle witticism.

The loungers at the door made way for one of their party, who was half dragged, half pushed into the shop. "Here he is," said half a dozen eager voices, in the fond belief that his presence might impart additional humor to the situation. He cast a deprecating glance at Mrs. Tucker, and said, "It 's so, madam! This yer place *is* attached; but if there 's anything you 're wanting, why I reckon, boys," — he turned half appealingly to the crowd, — "we could oblige a lady." There was a vague sound of angry opposition and remonstrance from the back door of the shop, but the majority, partly overcome by Mrs. Tucker's beauty, assented. "Only," continued the officer explanatorily, "ez these yer goods are in the hands of the creditors, they ought to be represented by an equivalent in money. If you 're expecting they should be charged" —

"But I wish to *pay* for them," interrupted Mrs. Tucker, with a slight flush of indignation; "I have the money."

"Oh, I bet you have!" screamed a voice, as, overturning all opposition, the malcontent at the back door, in the shape of an infuriated woman, forced her way into the shop. "I 'll bet you have the money! Look at her, boys! Look at the wife of the thief, with the stolen money in diamonds in her ears and rings on her fingers. *She* 's got money if *we* 've none. *She* can pay for what she fancies, if we have n't a cent to redeem the bed that 's stolen from under us. Oh, yes, buy it all, Mrs. Spencer Tucker! buy the whole shop, Mrs. Spencer Tucker, do you hear? And if you ain't satisfied then, buy my clothes, my wedding ring, the only things your husband has n't stolen."

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Tucker coldly, turning towards the door. But with a flying leap across

the counter her relentless adversary stood between her and retreat.

"You don't understand! Perhaps you don't understand that your husband not only stole the hard labor of these men, but even the little money they brought here and trusted to his thieving hands. Perhaps you don't know that he stole my husband's hard earnings, mortgaged these very goods you want to buy, and that he is to-day a convicted thief, a forger, and a runaway coward. Perhaps, if you can't understand *me*, you can read the newspaper. Look!" She exultingly opened the paper the sheriff had been reading aloud, and pointed to the displayed headlines. "Look! there are the very words, 'Forgery, Swindling, Embezzlement!' Do you see? And perhaps you can't understand this. Look! 'Shameful Flight. Abandons his Wife. Runs off with a Notorious'" —

"Easy, old gal, easy now. D—n it! Will you dry up? I say. *Stop!*"

It was too late! The sheriff had dashed the paper from the woman's hand, but not until Mrs. Tucker had read a single line, a line such as she had sometimes turned from with weary scorn in her careless perusal of the daily shameful chronicle of domestic infelicity. Then she had coldly wondered if there could be any such men and women. And now! The crowd fell back before her; even the virago was silenced as she looked at her face. The humorist's face was as white, but not as immobile, as he gasped, "Christ! if I don't believe she knew nothin' of it!"

For a moment the full force of such a supposition, with all its poignancy, its dramatic intensity, and its pathos, possessed the crowd. In the momentary clairvoyance of enthusiasm they caught a glimpse of the truth, and by one of the strange reactions of human passion they only waited for a word of appeal or explanation from her lips to throw themselves at her feet. Had she simply told her story

they would have believed her; had she cried, fainted, or gone into hysterics, they would have pitied her. She did neither. Perhaps she thought of neither, or indeed of anything that was then before her eyes. She walked erect to the door, and turned upon the threshold. "I mean what I say," she said calmly. "I don't understand you. But whatever just claims you have upon my husband will be paid by me, or by his lawyer, Captain Poindexter."

She had lost the sympathy but not the respect of her hearers. They made way for her with sullen deference as she passed out on the platform. But her adversary, profiting by the last opportunity, burst into an ironical laugh.

"Captain Poindexter, is it? Well, perhaps he 's safe to pay *your* bill; but as for your husband's" —

"That 's another matter," interrupted a familiar voice with the greatest cheerfulness; "that 's what you were going to say, was n't it? Ha, ha! Well, Mrs. Patterson," continued Poindexter, stepping from his buggy, "you never spoke a truer word in your life. — One moment, Mrs. Tucker. Let me send you back in the buggy. Don't mind *me*. I can get a fresh horse of the sheriff. I 'm quite at home here." Then, turning to one of the bystanders, "I say, Patterson, step a few paces this way, will you? A little further from your wife, please. That will do. You 've got a claim of five thousand dollars against the property, have n't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that woman just driving away is your one solitary chance of getting a cent of it. If your wife insults her again, that chance is gone. And if *you* do" —

"Well?"

"As sure as there is a God in Israel and a Supreme Court of the State of California, I 'll kill you in your tracks! — Stay!"

Patterson turned. The irrepressible look of humorous

tolerance of all human frailty had suffused Poindexter's black eyes with mischievous moisture. "If you think it quite safe to confide to your wife this prospect of her improvement by widowhood, you may!"

III

Mr. Patterson did not inform his wife of the lawyer's personal threat to himself. But he managed, after Poindexter had left, to make her conscious that Mrs. Tucker might be a power to be placated and feared. "You 've shot off your mouth at her," he said argumentatively, "and whether you 've hit the mark or not you 've had your say. Ef you think it 's worth a possible five thousand dollars and interest to keep on, heave ahead. Ef you rather have the chance of getting the rest in cash, you 'll let up on her." "You don't suppose," returned Mrs. Patterson contemptuously, "that she 's got anything but what that man of hers —Poindexter — lets her have?" "The sheriff says," retorted Patterson surlily, "that she 's notified him that she claims the rancho as a gift from her husband three years ago, and she 's in *possession* now, and was so when the execution was out. It don't make no matter," he added, with gloomy philosophy, "who 's got a full hand as long as *we* ain't got the cards to chip in. I would n't 'a' minded it," he continued meditatively, "ef Spence Tucker had dropped a hint to me afore he put out." "And I suppose," said Mrs. Patterson angrily, "you 'd have put out too?" "I reckon," said Patterson simply.

Twice or thrice during the evening he referred, more or less directly, to this lack of confidence shown by his late debtor and employer, and seemed to feel it more keenly than the loss of property. He confided his sentiments quite openly to the sheriff in possession, over the whiskey

and euchre with which these gentlemen avoided the difficulties of their delicate relations. He brooded over it as he handed the keys of the shop to the sheriff when they parted for the night, and was still thinking of it when the house was closed, everybody gone to bed, and he was fetching a fresh jug of water from the well. The moon was at times obscured by flying clouds, the avant-couriers of the regular evening shower. He was stooping over the well, when he sprang suddenly to his feet again. "Who's there?" he demanded sharply.

"Hush!" said a voice so low and faint it might have been a whisper of the wind in the palisades of the corral. But, indistinct as it was, it was the voice of a man he was thinking of as far away, and it sent a thrill of alternate awe and pleasure through his pulses.

He glanced quickly round. The moon was hidden by a passing cloud, and only the faint outlines of the house he had just quitted were visible. "Is that you, Spence?" he said tremulously.

"Yes," replied the voice, and a figure dimly emerged from the corner of the corral.

"Lay low, lay low, for God's sake," said Patterson, hurriedly throwing himself upon the apparition. "The sheriff and his posse are in there."

"But I must speak to you a moment," said the figure.

"Wait," said Patterson, glancing toward the building. Its blank, shutterless windows revealed no inner light; a profound silence encompassed it. "Come quick," he whispered. Letting his grasp slip down to the unresisting hand of the stranger, he half dragged, half led him, brushing against the wall, into the open door of the deserted bar-room he had just quitted, locked the inner door, poured a glass of whiskey from a decanter, gave it to him, and then watched him drain it at a single draught. The moon came out, and falling through the bare windows full upon the stranger's

face, revealed the artistic but slightly disheveled curls and mustache of the fugitive, Spencer Tucker.

Whatever may have been the real influence of this unfortunate man upon his fellows, it seemed to find expression in a singular unanimity of criticism. Patterson looked at him with a half-dismal, half-welcoming smile. "Well, you are a h—ll of a fellow, ain't you?"

Spencer Tucker passed his hand through his hair and lifted it from his forehead, with a gesture at once emotional and theatrical. "I am a man with a price on me!" he said bitterly. "Give me up to the sheriff, and you 'll get five thousand dollars. Help me, and you 'll get nothing. That 's my d—d luck, and yours too, I suppose."

"I reckon you 're right there," said Patterson gloomily. "But I thought you got clean away — went off in a ship" —

"Went off in a boat to a ship," interrupted Tucker savagely; "went off to a ship that had all my things on board — everything. The cursed boat capsized in a squall just off the Heads. The ship, d—n her, sailed away, the men thinking I was drowned likely, and that they 'd make a good thing off my goods, I reckon."

"But the girl, Inez, who was with you, did n't she make a row?"

"Quien sabe?" returned Tucker, with a reckless laugh. "Well, I hung on like grim death to that boat's keel until one of those Chinese fishermen, in a 'dug-out,' hauled me in opposite Saucelito. I chartered him and his dug-out to bring me down here."

"Why here?" asked Patterson, with a certain ostentatious caution that ill concealed his pensive satisfaction.

"You may well ask," returned Tucker, with an equal ostentation of bitterness, as he slightly waved his companion away. "But I reckoned I could trust a white man that I 'd been kind to, and who would n't go back on me. No, no, let me go! Hand me over to the sheriff!"

Patterson had suddenly grasped both the hands of the picturesque scamp before him, with an affection that for an instant almost shamed the man who had ruined him. But Tucker's egotism whispered that this affection was only a recognition of his own superiority, and felt flattered. He was beginning to believe that he was really the injured party.

"What I *have* and what I have *had* is yours, Spence," returned Patterson, with a sad and simple directness that made any further discussion a gratuitous insult. "I only wanted to know what you reckoned to do here."

"I want to get over across the Coast Range to Monterey," said Tucker. "Once there, one of those coasting schooners will bring me down to Acapulco, where the ship will put in."

Patterson remained silent for a moment. "There 's a mustang in the corral you can take — leastways, I sha'n't know that it 's gone — until to-morrow afternoon. In an hour from now," he added, looking from the window, "these clouds will settle down to business. It will rain; there will be light enough for you to find your way by the regular trail over the mountain, but not enough for any one to know you. If you can't push through to-night, you can lie over at the posada on the summit. Them greasers that keep it won't know you, and if they did they won't go back on you. And if they did go back on you, nobody would believe them. It 's mighty curious," he added, with gloomy philosophy, "but I reckon it 's the reason why Providence allows this kind of cattle to live among white men and others made in his image. Take a piece of pie, won't you?" he continued, abandoning this abstract reflection and producing half a flat pumpkin pie from the bar. Spencer Tucker grasped the pie with one hand and his friend's fingers with the other, and for a few moments was silent from the hurried deglutition of viand and sentiment. "*You* 're a white man, Pat-

terson, anyway," he resumed. "I'll take your horse, and put it down in our account at your own figure. As soon as this cursed thing is blown over, I'll be back here and see you through, you bet! I don't desert my friends, however rough things go with me."

"I see you don't," returned Patterson, with an unconscious and serious simplicity that had the effect of the most exquisite irony. "I was only just saying to the sheriff that if there was anything I could have done for you, you would n't have cut away without letting me know." Tucker glanced uneasily at Patterson, who continued, "Ye ain't wanting anything else?" Then observing that his former friend and patron was roughly but newly clothed, and betrayed no trace of his last escapade, he added, "I see you 've got a fresh harness."

"That d—d Chinaman bought me these at the landing. They 're not much in style or fit," he continued, trying to get a moonlight view of himself in the mirror behind the bar, "but that don't matter here." He filled another glass of spirits, jauntily settled himself back in his chair, and added, "I don't suppose there are any girls around, anyway."

"'Cept your wife; she was down here this afternoon," said Patterson meditatively.

Mr. Tucker paused with the pie in his hand. "Ah, yes!" He essayed a reckless laugh, but that evident simulation failed before Patterson's melancholy. With an assumption of falling in with his friend's manner, rather than from any personal anxiety, he continued, "Well?"

"That man Poindexter was down here with her. Put her in the hacienda to hold possession afore the news came out."

"Impossible!" said Tucker, rising hastily. "It don't belong — that is" — he hesitated.

"Yer thinking the creditors 'll get it, mebbe," returned

Patterson, gazing at the floor. "Not as long as she 's in it; no, sir! Whether it 's really hers, or she 's only keeping house for Poindexter, she 's a fixture, you bet. They are a team when they pull together, they are!"

The smile slowly faded from Tucker's face, that now looked quite rigid in the moonlight. He put down his glass, and walked to the window as Patterson gloomily continued: "But that 's nothing to you. You 've got ahead of 'em both, and had your revenge by going off with the gal. That 's what I said all along. When folks — specially women folks — wondered how you could leave a woman like your wife, and go off with a scallawag like that gal, I allers said they 'd find out there was a reason. And when your wife came flaunting down here with Poindexter before she 'd quite got quit of you, I reckon they began to see the whole little game. No, sir! I knew it was n't on account of the gal! Why, when you came here to-night and told me quite nat'ral-like and easy how she went off in the ship, and then calmly ate your pie and drank your whiskey after it, I knew you did n't care for her. There 's my hand, Spence; you 're a trump, even if you are a little looney, eh? Why, what 's up?"

Shallow and selfish as Tucker was, Patterson's words seemed like a revelation, that shocked him as profoundly as it might have shocked a nobler nature. The simple vanity and selfishness that made him unable to conceive any higher reason for his wife's loyalty than his own personal popularity and success, now that he no longer possessed that éclat, made him equally capable of the lowest suspicions. He was a dishonored fugitive, broken in fortune and reputation — why should she not desert him? He had been unfaithful to her from wildness, from caprice, from the effect of those fascinating qualities; it seemed to him natural that she should be disloyal from more deliberate motives, and he hugged himself with that belief. Yet

there was enough doubt, enough of haunting suspicion, that he had lost or alienated a powerful affection, to make him thoroughly miserable. He returned his friend's grasp convulsively, and buried his face upon his shoulder. But he was not above feeling a certain exultation in the effect of his misery upon the dog-like, unreasoning affection of Patterson, nor could he entirely refrain from slightly posing his affliction before that sympathetic but melancholy man. Suddenly he raised his head, drew back, and thrust his hand into his bosom with a theatrical gesture.

"What 's to keep me from killing Poindexter in his tracks ? " he said wildly.

"Nothin' but *his* shooting first," returned Patterson, with dismal practicality. "He 's mighty quick, like all them army men. It 's about even, I reckon, that he don't get *me* first," he added in an ominous voice.

"No ! " returned Tucker, grasping his hand again. "This is not your affair, Patterson ; leave him to me when I come back."

"If he ever gets the drop on me, I reckon he won't wait," continued Patterson lugubriously. "He seems to object to my passin' criticism on your wife, as if she was a queen or an angel."

The blood came to Spencer's cheek, and he turned uneasily to the window. "It 's dark enough now for a start," he said hurriedly, "and if I could get across the mountain without lying over at the summit, it would be a day gained."

Patterson arose without a word, filled a flask of spirit, handed it to his friend, and silently led the way through the slowly falling rain and the now settled darkness. The mustang was quickly secured and saddled ; a heavy poncho afforded Tucker a disguise as well as a protection from the rain. With a few hurried, disconnected words, and an abstracted air, he once more shook his friend's hand, and

issued cautiously from the corral. When out of earshot from the house he put spurs to the mustang, and dashed into a gallop.

To intersect the mountain road he was obliged to traverse part of the highway his wife had walked that afternoon, and to pass within a mile of the casa where she was. Long before he reached that point his eyes were straining the darkness in that direction for some indication of the house which was to him familiar. Becoming now accustomed to the even obscurity, less trying to the vision than the alternate light and shadow of cloud or the full glare of the moonlight, he fancied he could distinguish its low walls over the monotonous level. One of those impulses which had so often taken the place of resolution in his character suddenly possessed him to diverge from his course and approach the house. Why, he could not have explained. It was not from any feeling of jealous suspicion or contemplated revenge — that had passed with the presence of Patterson; it was not from any vague lingering sentiment for the woman he had wronged — he would have shrunk from meeting her at that moment. But it was full of these and more possibilities by which he might or might not be guided, and was at least a movement towards some vague end, and a distraction from certain thoughts he dared not entertain and could not entirely dismiss. Inconceivable and inexplicable to human reason, it might have been acceptable to the Divine omniscience for its predestined result.

He left the road at a point where the marsh encroached upon the meadow, familiar to him already as near the spot where he had debarked from the Chinaman's boat the day before. He remembered that the walls of the hacienda were distinctly visible from the tules where he had hidden all day, and he now knew that the figures he had observed near the building, which had deterred his first attempts at

landing, must have been his wife and his friend. He knew that a long tongue of the slough filled by the rising tide followed the marsh, and lay between him and the hacienda. The sinking of his horse's hoofs in the spongy soil determined its proximity, and he made a détour to the right to avoid it. In doing so, a light suddenly rose above the distant horizon ahead of him, trembled faintly, and then burned with a steady lustre. It was a light at the hacienda. Guiding his horse half abstractedly in this direction, his progress was presently checked by the splashing of the animal's hoofs in the water. But the turf below was firm, and a salt drop that had spattered to his lips told him that it was only the encroaching of the tide in the meadow. With his eyes on the light, he again urged his horse forward. The rain lulled, the clouds began to break, the landscape alternately lightened and grew dark; the outlines of the crumbling hacienda walls that enshrined the light grew more visible. A strange and dreamy resemblance to the long blue-grass plain before his wife's paternal house, as seen by him during his evening rides to courtship, pressed itself upon him. He remembered, too, that she used to put a light in the window to indicate her presence. Following this retrospect, the moon came boldly out, sparkled upon the overflow of silver at his feet, seemed to show the dark, opaque meadow beyond for a moment, and then disappeared. It was dark now, but the lesser earthly star still shone before him as a guide, and pushing towards it, he passed in the all-embracing shadow.

IV

As Mrs. Tucker, erect, white, and rigid, drove away from the tienda, it seemed to her to sink again into the monotonous plain, with all its horrible realities. Except that there was now a new and heart-breaking significance to the soli-

tude and loneliness of the landscape, all that had passed might have been a dream. But as the blood came back to her cheek, and little by little her tingling consciousness returned, it seemed as if her life had been the dream, and this last scene the awakening reality. With eyes smarting with the moisture of shame, the scarlet blood at times dyeing her very neck and temples, she muffled her lowered crest in her shawl, and bent over the reins. Bit by bit she recalled, in Poindexter's mysterious caution and strange allusions, the corroboration of her husband's shame and her own disgrace. This was why she was brought hither — the deserted wife, the abandoned confederate! The mocking glitter of the concave vault above her, scoured by the incessant wind, the cold stare of the shining pools beyond, the hard outlines of the Coast Range, and the jarring accompaniment of her horse's hoofs and rattling buggy-wheels, alternately goaded and distracted her. She found herself repeating "No! no! no!" with the dogged reiteration of fever. She scarcely knew when or how she reached the hacienda. She was only conscious that as she entered the patio the dusky solitude that had before filled her with unrest now came to her like balm. A benumbing peace seemed to fall from the crumbling walls; the peace of utter seclusion, isolation, oblivion, death! Nevertheless, an hour later, when the jingle of spurs and bridle were again heard in the road, she started to her feet with bent brows and a kindling eye, and confronted Captain Poindexter in the corridor.

"I would not have intruded upon you so soon again," he said gravely, "but I thought I might perhaps spare you a repetition of the scene of this morning. Hear me out, please," he added, with a gentle, half-deprecating gesture, as she lifted the beautiful scorn of her eyes to his. "I have just heard that your neighbor, Don José Santierra, of Los Gatos, is on his way to this house. He once claimed

this land, and hated your husband, who bought of the rival claimant, whose grant was confirmed. I tell you this," he added, slightly flushing as Mrs. Tucker turned impatiently away, "only to show you that legally he has no rights, and you need not see him unless you choose. I could not stop his coming without perhaps doing you more harm than good; but when he does come, my presence under this roof as your legal counsel will enable you to refer him to me." He stopped. She was pacing the corridor with short, impatient steps, her arms dropped, and her hands clasped rigidly before her. "Have I your permission to stay?"

She suddenly stopped in her walk, approached him rapidly, and fixing her eyes on his, said, —

"Do I know *all*, now — everything?"

He could only reply that she had not yet told him what she had heard.

"Well," she said scornfully, "that my husband has been cruelly imposed upon — imposed upon by some wretched woman, who has made him sacrifice his property, his friends, his honor — everything but me!"

"Everything but whom?" gasped Poindexter.

"But ME!"

Poindexter gazed at the sky, the air, the deserted corridor, the stones of the patio itself, and then at the inexplicable woman before him. Then he said gravely, "I think you know everything."

"Then if my husband has left me all he could — this property," she went on rapidly, twisting her handkerchief between her fingers, "I can do with it what I like, can't I?"

"You certainly can."

"Then sell it," she said with passionate vehemence. "Sell it — all! everything! And sell these." She darted into her bedroom, and returned with the diamond rings she had torn from her fingers and ears when she entered the

house. "Sell them for anything they'll bring, only sell them at once."

"But for what?" asked Poindexter, with demure lips but twinkling eyes.

"To pay the debts that this — this — woman has led him into; to return the money she has stolen!" she went on rapidly; "to keep him from sharing infamy! Can't you understand?"

"But, my dear madam," began Poindexter, "even if this could be done" —

"Don't tell me 'if it could' — it *must* be done. Do you think I could sleep under this roof, propped up by the timbers of that ruined tienda? Do you think I could wear those diamonds again, while that termagant shopwoman can say that her money bought them? No! If you are my husband's friend, you will do this — for — for his sake." She stopped, locked and interlocked her cold fingers before her, and said, hesitating and mechanically, "You meant well, Captain Poindexter, in bringing me here, I know! You must not think that I blame you for it, or for the miserable result of it that you have just witnessed. But if I have gained anything by it, for God's sake let me reap it quickly, that I may give it to these people and go! I have a friend who can aid me to get to my husband or to my home in Kentucky, where Spencer will yet find me, I know. I want nothing more." She stopped again. With another woman the pause would have been one of tears. But she kept her head above the flood that filled her heart, and the clear eyes fixed upon Poindexter, albeit pained, were undimmed.

"But this would require time," said Poindexter, with a smile of compassionate explanation; "you could not sell now, nobody would buy. You are safe to hold this property while you are in actual possession, but you are not strong enough to guarantee it to another. There may still

be litigation; your husband has other creditors than these people you have talked with. But while nobody could oust you — the wife who would have the sympathies of judge and jury — it might be a different case with any one who derived title from you. Any purchaser would know that you could not sell, or if you did, it would be at a ridiculous sacrifice."

She listened to him abstractedly, walked to the end of the corridor, returned, and without looking up, said, —

"I suppose you know her?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"This woman. You have seen her?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"And you are his friend! That 's strange." She raised her eyes to his. "Well," she continued impatiently, "who is she? and what is she? You know that surely."

"I know no more of her than what I have said," said Poindexter. "She is a notorious woman."

The swift color came to Mrs. Tucker's face as if the epithet had been applied to herself. "I suppose," she said in a dry voice, as if she were asking a business question, but with an eye that showed her rising anger, — "I suppose there is some law by which creatures of this kind can be followed and brought to justice — some law that would keep innocent people from suffering for their crimes?"

"I am afraid," said Poindexter, "that arresting her would hardly help these people over in the tienda."

"I am not speaking of them," responded Mrs. Tucker, with a sudden sublime contempt for the people whose cause she had espoused; "I am talking of my husband."

Poindexter bit his lip. "You 'd hardly think of bringing back the strongest witness against him," he said bluntly.

Mrs. Tucker dropped her eyes and was silent. A sudden shame suffused Poindexter's cheek; he felt as if he had struck that woman a blow. "I beg your pardon," he said hastily; "I am talking like a lawyer to a lawyer." He

would have taken any other woman by the hand in the honest fullness of his apology, but something restrained him here. He only looked down gently on her lowered lashes, and repeated his question if he should remain during the coming interview with Don José. "I must beg you to determine quickly," he added, "for I already hear him entering the gate."

"Stay," said Mrs. Tucker, as the ringing of spurs and clatter of hoofs came from the corral. "One moment." She looked up suddenly, and said, "How long had he known her?" But before he could reply there was a step in the doorway, and the figure of Don José Santierra emerged from the archway.

He was a man slightly past middle age, fair, and well shaven, wearing a black broadcloth serape, the deeply embroidered opening of which formed a collar of silver rays around his neck, while a row of silver buttons down the side seams of his riding-trousers, and silver spurs completed his singular equipment. Mrs. Tucker's swift feminine glance took in these details, as well as the deep salutation, more formal than the exuberant frontier politeness she was accustomed to, with which he greeted her. It was enough to arrest her first impulse to retreat. She hesitated and stopped as Poindexter stepped forward, partly interposing between them, acknowledging Don José's distant recognition of himself with an ironical accession of his usual humorous tolerance. The Spaniard did not seem to notice it, but remained gravely silent before Mrs. Tucker, gazing at her with an expression of intent and unconscious absorption.

"You are quite right, Don José," said Poindexter, with ironical concern, "it *is* Mrs. Tucker. Your eyes do *not* deceive you. She will be glad to do the honors of her house," he continued, with a simulation of appealing to her, "unless you visit her on business, when I need not say *I* shall be only too happy to attend you, as before."

Don José, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, allowed himself to become conscious of the lawyer's meaning. "It is not of business that I come to kiss the señora's hand to-day," he replied, with a melancholy softness; "it is as her neighbor, to put myself at her disposition. Ah! what have we here fit for a lady?" he continued, raising his eyes in deprecation of the surroundings; "a house of nothing, a place of winds and dry bones, without refreshments, or satisfaction, or delicacy. The señora will not refuse to make us proud this day to send her of that which we have in our poor home at Los Gatos, to make her more complete. Of what shall it be? Let her make choice. Or if she would commemorate this day by accepting of our hospitality at Los Gatos, until she shall arrange herself the more to receive us here, we shall have too much honor."

"The señora would only find it the more difficult to return to this humble roof again, after once leaving it for Don José's hospitality," said Poindexter, with a demure glance at Mrs. Tucker. But the innuendo seemed to lapse equally unheeded by his fair client and the stranger. Raising her eyes with a certain timid dignity which Don José's presence seemed to have called out, she addressed herself to him.

"You are very kind and considerate, Mister Santierra, and I thank you. I know that my husband" — she let the clear beauty of her translucent eyes rest full on both men — "would thank you too. But I shall not be here long enough to accept your kindness in this house nor in your own. I have but one desire and object now. It is to dispose of this property, and indeed all I possess, to pay the debt of my husband. It is in your power, perhaps, to help me. I am told that you wish to possess Los Cuervos," she went on, equally oblivious of the consciousness that appeared in Don José's face, and a humorous perplexity on the brow of Poindexter. "If you can arrange it with Mr. Poindexter,

you will find me a liberal vendor. That much you can do, and I know you will believe I shall be grateful. You can do no more, unless it be to say to your friends that Mrs. Belle Tucker remains here only for that purpose, and to carry out what she knows to be the wishes of her husband." She paused, bent her pretty crest, dropped a quaint curtsey to the superior age, the silver braid, and the gentlemanly bearing of Don José, and with the passing sunshine of a smile disappeared from the corridor.

The two men remained silent for a moment, Don José gazing abstractedly on the door through which she had vanished, until Poindexter, with a return of his tolerant smile, said, "You have heard the views of Mrs. Tucker. You know the situation as well as she does."

"Ah, yes; possibly better."

Poindexter darted a quick glance at the grave, sallow face of Don José, but, detecting no unusual significance in his manner, continued, "As you see, she leaves this matter in my hands. Let us talk like business men. Have you any idea of purchasing this property?"

"Of purchasing? ah, no."

Poindexter bent his brows, but quickly relaxed them with a smile of humorous forgiveness. "If you have any other idea, Don José, I ought to warn you, as Mrs. Tucker's lawyer, that she is in legal possession here, and that nothing but her own act can change that position."

"Ah, so."

Irritated at the shrug which accompanied this, Poindexter continued haughtily, "If I am to understand, you have nothing to say" —

"To say, ah, yes, possibly. But" — he glanced toward the door of Mrs. Tucker's room — "not here." He stopped, appeared to recall himself, and, with an apologetic smile and a studied but graceful gesture of invitation, he motioned to the gateway, and said, "Will you ride?"

"What can the fellow be up to?" muttered Poindexter, as with an assenting nod he proceeded to remount his horse. "If he was n't an old hidalgo, I 'd mistrust him. No matter! here goes!"

The don also remounted his half-broken mustang; they proceeded in solemn silence through the corral, and side by side emerged on the open plain. Poindexter glanced round; no other being was in sight. It was not until the lonely hacienda had also sunk behind them that Don José broke the silence.

"You say just now we shall speak as business men. I say no, Don Marco; I will not. I shall speak, we shall speak, as gentlemen."

"Go on," said Poindexter, who was beginning to be amused.

"I say just now I will not purchase the rancho from the señora. And why? Look you, Don Marco," — he reined in his horse, thrust his hand under his serape, and drew out a folded document, — "this is why."

With a smile, Poindexter took the paper from his hand and opened it. But the smile faded from his lips as he read. With blazing eyes he spurred his horse beside the Spaniard, almost unseating him, and said sternly, "What does this mean?"

"What does it mean?" repeated Don José, with equally flashing eyes; "I'll tell you. It means that your client, this man Spencer Tucker, is a Judas, a traitor! It means that he gave Los Cuervos to his mistress a year ago, and that she sold it to me — to me, you hear! — *me*, José Santierra, the day before she left! It means that the coyote of a Spencer, the thief, who bought these lands of a thief and gave them to a thief, has tricked you all. Look," he said, rising in his saddle, holding the paper like a bâton, and defining with a sweep of his arm the whole level plain; "all these lands were once mine — they are mine again to-

day. Do I want to purchase Los Cuervos? you ask, for you will speak of the *business*. Well, listen. I *have* purchased Los Cuervos, and here is the deed."

"But it has never been recorded," said Poindexter, with a carelessness he was far from feeling.

"Of a verity, no. Do you wish that I should record it?" asked Don José, with a return of his simple gravity.

Poindexter bit his lip. "You said we were to talk like gentlemen," he returned. "Do you think you have come into possession of this alleged deed like a gentleman?"

Don José shrugged his shoulders. "I found it tossed in the lap of a harlot. I bought it for a song. Eh, what would you?"

"Would you sell it again for a song?" asked Poindexter.

"Ah! what is this?" said Don José, lifting his iron-gray brows; "but a moment ago we would sell everything, for any money. Now we would buy. Is it so?"

"One moment, Don José," said Poindexter, with a baleful light in his dark eyes. "Do I understand that you are the ally of Spencer Tucker and his mistress, that you intend to turn this doubly betrayed wife from the only roof she has to cover her?"

"Ah, I comprehend not. You heard her say she wished to go. Perhaps it may please *me* to distribute largess to these cattle yonder, — I do not say no. More she does not ask. But *you*, Don Marco, of whom are you advocate? You abandon your client's mistress for the wife, is it so?"

"What I may do you will learn hereafter," said Poindexter, who had regained his composure, suddenly reining up his horse. "As our paths seem likely to diverge, they had better begin now. Good-morning."

"Patience, my friend, patience! Ah, blessed St. Anthony, what these Americans are! Listen. For what *you* shall do, I do not inquire. The question is to me what I" — he emphasized the pronoun by tapping himself on the

breast — "I, José Santierra, will do. Well, I shall tell you. To-day, nothing. To-morrow, nothing. For a week, for a month, nothing! After, we shall see."

Poindexter paused thoughtfully. "Will you give your word, Don José, that you will not press the claim for a month?"

"Truly, on one condition. Observe! I do not ask you for an equal promise, that you will not take this time to defend yourself." He shrugged his shoulder. "No! It is only this. You shall promise that during that time the Señora Tucker shall remain ignorant of this document."

Poindexter hesitated a moment. "I promise," he said at last.

"Good. Adios, Don Marco."

"Adios, Don José."

The Spaniard put spurs to his mustang and galloped off in the direction of Los Gatos. The lawyer remained for a moment gazing on his retreating but victorious figure. For the first time the old look of humorous toleration with which Mr. Poindexter was in the habit of regarding all human infirmity gave way to something like bitterness. "I might have guessed it," he said, with a slight rise of color. "He 's an old fool; and she — well, perhaps it 's all the better for her!" He glanced backwards almost tenderly in the direction of Los Cuervos, and then turned his head towards the embarcadero.

As the afternoon wore on, a creaking, antiquated ox-cart arrived at Los Cuervos, bearing several articles of furniture and some tasteful ornaments from Los Gatos, at the same time that a young Mexican girl mysteriously appeared in the kitchen, as a temporary assistant to the decrepit Concha. These were both clearly attributable to Don José, whose visit was not so remote but that these delicate attentions might have been already projected before Mrs. Tucker had declined them, and she could not, without marked discourtesy, return

them now. She did not wish to seem discourteous; she would like to have been more civil to this old gentleman, who still retained the evidences of a picturesque and decorous past, and a repose so different from the life that was perplexing her. Reflecting that if he bought the estate these things would be ready to his hand, and with a woman's instinct recognizing their value in setting off the house to other purchasers' eyes, she took a pleasure in tastefully arranging them, and even found herself speculating how she might have enjoyed them herself had she been able to keep possession of the property. After all, it would not have been so lonely if refined and gentle neighbors, like this old man, would have sympathized with her; she had an instinctive feeling that, in their own hopeless decay and hereditary unfitness for this new civilization, they would have been more tolerant of her husband's failure than his own kind. She could not believe that Don José really hated her husband for buying of the successful claimant, as there was no other legal title. Allowing herself to become interested in the guileless gossip of the new handmaiden, proud of her broken English, she was drawn into a sympathy with the grave simplicity of Don José's character, a relic of that true nobility which placed this descendant of the Castilians and the daughter of a free people on the same level.

In this way the second day of her occupancy of Los Cuervos closed, with dumb clouds along the gray horizon, and the paroxysms of hysterical wind growing fainter and fainter outside the walls; with the moon rising after nightfall, and losing itself in silent and mysterious confidences with drifting scud. She went to bed early, but woke past midnight, hearing, as she thought, her own name called. The impression was so strong upon her that she rose, and, hastily enwrapping herself, went to the dark embrasures of the oven-shaped windows and looked out. The dwarfed oak beside the window was still dropping from a past

shower, but the level waste of marsh and meadow beyond seemed to advance and recede with the coming and going of the moon. Again she heard her name called, and this time in accents so strangely familiar that with a slight cry she ran into the corridor, crossed the patio, and reached the open gate. The darkness that had, even in this brief interval, again fallen upon the prospect, she tried in vain to pierce with eye and voice. A blank silence followed. Then the veil was suddenly withdrawn; the vast plain, stretching from the mountain to the sea, shone as clearly as in the light of day; the moving current of the channel glittered like black pearls, the stagnant pools like molten lead; but not a sign of life nor motion broke the monotony of the broad expanse. She must have surely dreamed it. A chill wind drove her back to the house again; she entered her bedroom, and in half an hour she was in a peaceful sleep.

V

The two men kept their secret. Mr. Poindexter convinced Mrs. Tucker that the sale of Los Cuervos could not be effected until the notoriety of her husband's flight had been fairly forgotten, and she was forced to accept her fate. The sale of her diamonds, which seemed to her to have realized a singularly extravagant sum, enabled her to quietly reinstate the Pattersons in the tienda and to discharge in full her husband's liabilities to the rancheros and his humbler retainers.

Meanwhile the winter rains had ceased. It seemed to her as if the clouds had suddenly one night struck their white tents and stolen away, leaving the unvanquished sun to mount the vacant sky the next morning alone, and possess it thenceforward unchallenged. One afternoon she thought the long sad waste before her window had caught

some tint of grayer color from the sunset; a week later she found it a blazing landscape of poppies, broken here and there by blue lagoons of lupine, by pools of daisies, by banks of dog-roses, by broad outlying shores of dandelions that scattered their lavish gold to the foot of the hills, where the green billows of wild oats carried it on and upwards to the darker crests of pines. For two months she was dazzled and bewildered with color. She had never before been face to face with this spendthrift Californian Flora, in her virgin wastefulness, her more than goddess-like prodigality. The teeming earth seemed to quicken and throb beneath her feet; the few circuits of a plow around the outlying corral were enough to call out a jungle growth of giant grain that almost hid the low walls of the hacienda. In this glorious fecundity of the earth, in this joyous renewal of life and color, in this opulent youth and freshness of soil and sky, it alone remained, the dead and sterile Past, left in the midst of buoyant rejuvenescence and resurrection, like an empty churchyard skull upturned on the springing turf. Its bronzed adobe walls mocked the green vine that embraced them, the crumbling dust of its courtyard remained ungerminating and unfruitful; to the thousand stirring voices without, its dry lips alone remained mute, unresponsive, and unchanged.

During this time Don José had become a frequent visitor at Los Cuervos, bringing with him at first his niece and sister in a stately precision of politeness that was not lost on the proud Blue Grass stranger. She returned their visit at Los Gatos, and there made the formal acquaintance of Don José's grandmother, a lady who still regarded the decrepit Concha as a giddy muchacha, and who herself glittered as with the phosphorescence of refined decay. Through this circumstance she learned that Don José was not yet fifty, and that his gravity of manner and sedateness was more the result of fastidious isolation and temperament than

years. She could not tell why the information gave her a feeling of annoyance, but it caused her to regret the absence of Poindexter, and to wonder, also somewhat nervously, why he had lately avoided her presence. The thought that he might be doing so from a recollection of the innuendoes of Mrs. Patterson caused a little tremor of indignation in her pulses. "As if" — but she did not finish the sentence even to herself, and her eyes filled with bitter tears.

Yet she had thought of the husband who had so cruelly wronged her less feverishly, less impatiently, than before. For she thought she loved him now the more deeply, because, although she was not reconciled to his absence, it seemed to keep alive the memory of what he had been before his one wild act separated them. She had never seen the reflection of another woman's eyes in his; the past contained no haunting recollection of waning or alienated affection; she could meet him again, and, clasping her arms around him, awaken as if from a troubled dream without reproach or explanation. Her strong belief in this made her patient; she no longer sought to know the particulars of his flight, and never dreamed that her passive submission to his absence was partly due to a fear that something in his actual presence at that moment would have destroyed that belief forever.

For this reason the delicate reticence of the people at Los Gatos, and their seclusion from the world which knew of her husband's fault, had made her encourage the visits of Don José, until from the instinct already alluded to she one day summoned Poindexter to Los Cuervos, on the day that Don José usually called. But to her surprise the two men met more or less awkwardly and coldly, and her tact as hostess was tried to the utmost to keep their evident antagonism from being too apparent. The effort to reconcile their mutual discontent, and some other feeling she did not quite understand, produced a nervous excitement which

called the blood to her cheek and gave a dangerous brilliancy to her eyes, two circumstances not unnoticed nor unappreciated by her two guests. But instead of reuniting them, the prettier Mrs. Tucker became, the more distant and reserved grew the men, until Don José rose before his usual hour, and with more than usual ceremoniousness departed.

"Then my business does not seem to be with *him*," said Poindexter, with quiet coolness, as Mrs. Tucker turned her somewhat mystified face towards him. "Or have you anything to say to me about him in private?"

"I am sure I don't know what you both mean," she returned with a slight tremor of voice. "I had no idea you were not on good terms. I thought you were! It 's very awkward." Without coquetry and unconsciously she raised her blue eyes under her lids until the clear pupils coyly and softly hid themselves in the corners of the brown lashes, and added, "You have both been so kind to me."

"Perhaps that is the reason," said Poindexter gravely. But Mrs. Tucker refused to accept the suggestion with equal gravity, and began to laugh. The laugh, which was at first frank, spontaneous, and almost child-like, was becoming hysterical and nervous as she went on, until it was suddenly checked by Poindexter.

"I have had no difficulties with Don José Santierra," he said, somewhat coldly ignoring her hilarity, "but perhaps he is not inclined to be as polite to the friend of the husband as he is to the wife."

"Mr. Poindexter!" said Mrs. Tucker quickly, her face becoming pale again.

"I beg your pardon!" said Poindexter, flushing, "but"—

"You want to say," she interrupted coolly, "that you are not friends, I see. Is that the reason why you have avoided this house?" she continued gently.

"I thought I could be of more service to you elsewhere," he replied evasively. "I have been lately following up a certain clue rather closely. I think I am on the track of a confidante of — of — that woman."

A quick shadow passed over Mrs. Tucker's face. "Indeed!" she said coldly. "Then I am to believe that you prefer to spend your leisure moments in looking after that creature to calling here?"

Poindexter was stupefied. Was this the woman who only four months ago was almost vindictively eager to pursue her husband's paramour! There could be but one answer to it — Don José! Four months ago he would have smiled compassionately at it from his cynical preëminence. Now he managed with difficulty to stifle the bitterness of his reply.

"If you do not wish the inquiry carried on," he began, "of course" —

"I? What does it matter to me?" she said coolly. "Do as you please."

Nevertheless, half an hour later, as he was leaving, she said, with a certain hesitating timidity, "Do not leave me so much alone here, and let that woman go."

This was not the only unlooked-for sequel to her innocent desire to propitiate her best friends. Don José did not call again upon his usual day, but in his place came Doña Clara, his younger sister. When Mrs. Tucker had politely asked after the absent Don José, Doña Clara wound her swarthy arms around the fair American's waist and replied, "But why did you send for the abogado Poindexter when my brother called?"

"But Captain Poindexter calls as one of my friends," said the amazed Mrs. Tucker. "He is a gentleman, and has been a soldier and an officer," she added with some warmth.

"Ah, yes, a soldier of the law, what you call an *oficial*

de policia, a chief of gendarmes, my sister, but not a gentleman, — a camarero to protect a lady."

Mrs. Tucker would have uttered a hasty reply, but the perfect and good-natured simplicity of Doña Clara withheld her. Nevertheless, she treated Don José with a certain reserve at their next meeting, until it brought the simple-minded Castilian so dangerously near the point of demanding an explanation which implied too much that she was obliged to restore him temporarily to his old footing. Meantime she had a brilliant idea. She would write to Calhoun Weaver, whom she had avoided since that memorable day. She would say she wished to consult him. He would come to Los Cuervos; he might suggest something to lighten this weary waiting; at least she would show them all that she had still old friends. Yet she did not dream of returning to her Blue Grass home; her parents had died since she left; she shrank from the thought of dragging her ruined life before the hopeful youth of her girlhood's companions.

Mr. Calhoun Weaver arrived promptly, ostentatiously, oracularly, and cordially, but a little coarsely. He had — did she remember? — expected this from the first. Spencer had lost his head through vanity, and had attempted too much. It required foresight and firmness, as he himself — who had lately made successful "combinations" which she might perhaps have heard of — well knew. But Spencer had got the "big head." "As to that woman — a devilish handsome woman, too! — well, everybody knew that Spencer always had a weakness that way, and he would say — But if she did n't care to hear any more about her — well, perhaps she was right. That was the best way to take it." Sitting before her, prosperous, weak, egotistical, incompetent, unavailable, and yet filled with a vague kindliness of intent, Mrs. Tucker loathed him. A sickening perception of her own weakness in send-

ing for him, a new and aching sense of her utter isolation and helplessness, seemed to paralyze her.

"Nat'rally you feel bad," he continued, with the large air of a profound student of human nature. "Nat'rally, nat'rally you 're kept in an uncomfortable state, not knowing jist how you stand. There ain't but one thing to do. Jist rise up, quiet like, and get a divorce agin Spencer. Hold on! There ain't a judge or jury in California that would n't give it to you right off the nail, without asking questions. Why, you 'd get it by default if you wanted to; you 'd just have to walk over the course! And then, Belle," he drew his chair still nearer her, "when you 've settled down again — well! — I don't mind renewing that offer I once made ye, before Spencer ever came round ye — I don't mind, Belle, I swear I don't! Honest Injin! I 'm in earnest, there 's my hand."

Mrs. Tucker's reply has not been recorded. Enough that half an hour later Mr. Weaver appeared in the courtyard with traces of tears on his foolish face, a broken falsetto voice, and other evidence of mental and moral disturbance. His cordiality and oracular predisposition remained sufficiently to enable him to suggest the magical words "Blue Grass" mysteriously to Concha, with an indication of his hand to the erect figure of her pale mistress in the doorway, who waved to him a silent but half-compassionate farewell.

At about this time a slight change in her manner was noticed by the few who saw her more frequently. Her apparently invincible girlishness of spirit had given way to a certain matronly seriousness. She applied herself to her household cares and the improvement of the hacienda with a new sense of duty and a settled earnestness, until by degrees she wrought into it not only her instinctive delicacy and taste, but part of her own individuality. Even the rude rancheros and tradesmen who were permitted to enter

the walls in the exercise of their calling began to speak mysteriously of the beauty of this garden of the almarjal. She went out but seldom, and then, accompanied by one or the other of her female servants, in long drives on unfrequented roads. On Sundays she sometimes drove to the half-ruined mission church of Santa Inez, and hid herself, during mass, in the dim monastic shadows of the choir. Gradually the poorer people whom she met in these journeys began to show an almost devotional reverence for her, stopping in the roads with uncovered heads for her to pass, or making way for her in the tienda or plaza of the wretched town with dumb courtesy. She began to feel a strange sense of widowhood, that, while it at times brought tears to her eyes, was not without a certain tender solace. In the sympathy and simpleness of this impulse she went as far as to revive the mourning she had worn for her parents, but with such a fatal accenting of her beauty, and dangerous misinterpreting of her condition to eligible bachelors strange to the country, that she was obliged to put it off again. Her reserved and dignified manner caused others to mistake her nationality for that of the Santierras, and in "Doña Bella" the simple Mrs. Tucker was for a while forgotten. At times she even forgot it herself. Accustomed now almost entirely to the accents of another language and the features of another race, she would sit for hours in the corridor, whose massive bronzed inclosure even her tasteful care could only make an embowered mausoleum of the Past, or gaze abstractedly from the dark embrasures of her windows across the stretching almarjal to the shining lagoon beyond that terminated the estuary. She had a strange fondness for this tranquil mirror, which under sun or stars always retained the passive reflex of the sky above, and seemed to rest her weary eyes. She had objected to one of the plans projected by Poindexter to redeem the land and deepen the water at the embarcadero, as it would have

drained the lagoon, and the lawyer had postponed the improvement to gratify her fancy. So she kept it through the long summer unchanged save by the shadows of passing wings or the lazy files of sleeping sea-fowl.

On one of these afternoons she noticed a slowly moving carriage leave the highroad and cross the almarjal skirting the edge of the lagoon. If it contained visitors for Los Cuervos, they had evidently taken a shorter cut without waiting to go on to the regular road which intersected the highway at right angles a mile farther on. It was with some sense of annoyance and irritation that she watched the trespass, and finally saw the vehicle approach the house. A few moments later the servant informed her that Mr. Patterson would like to see her alone. When she entered the corridor, which in the dry season served as a reception hall, she was surprised to see that Patterson was not alone. Near him stood a well-dressed, handsome woman, gazing about her with good-humored admiration of Mrs. Tucker's taste and ingenuity.

"It don't look much like it did two years ago," said the stranger cheerfully. "You 've improved it wonderfully."

Stiffening slightly, Mrs. Tucker turned inquiringly to Mr. Patterson. But that gentleman's usual profound melancholy appeared to be intensified by the hilarity of his companion. He only sighed deeply, and rubbed his leg with the brim of his hat in gloomy abstraction.

"Well! go on, then," said the woman, laughing and nudging him. "Go on — introduce me, can't you? Don't stand there like a tombstone. You won't? Well, I 'll introduce myself." She laughed again, and then, with an excellent imitation of Patterson's lugubrious accents, said, "Mr. Spencer Tucker's wife that *is*, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Spencer Tucker's sweetheart that *was!* Hold on! I said *that was*. For true as I stand here, ma'am, — and I reckon I would n't stand here if it was n't

true, — I have n't set eyes on him since the day he left you."

"It 's the gospel truth, every word," said Patterson, stirred into a sudden activity by Mrs. Tucker's white and rigid face. "It 's the frozen truth, and I kin prove it. For I kin swear that when that there young woman was sailin' outer the Golden Gate, Spencer Tucker was in my bar-room ; I kin swear that I fed him, lickered him, give him a hoss, and set him in his road to Monterey that very night."

"Then, where is he now ?" said Mrs. Tucker, suddenly facing them.

They looked at each other, and then looked at Mrs. Tucker. Then both together replied slowly and in perfect unison, "That 's — what — we — want — to — know." They seemed so satisfied with this effect that they as deliberately repeated, "Yes, — that 's — what — we — want — to — know."

Between the shock of meeting the partner of her husband's guilt and the unexpected revelation to her inexperience, that in suggestion and appearance there was nothing beyond the recollection of that guilt that was really shocking in the woman — between the extravagant extremes of hope and fear suggested by their words, there was something so grotesquely absurd in the melodramatic chorus that she with difficulty suppressed an hysterical laugh.

"That 's the way to take it," said the woman, putting her own good-humored interpretation upon Mrs. Tucker's expression. "Now, look here ! I 'll tell you all about it." She carefully selected the most comfortable chair, and sitting down, lightly crossed her hands in her lap. "Well, I left here on the 13th of last January on the ship Argo, calculating that your husband would join the ship just inside the Heads. That was our arrangement ; but if anything happened to prevent him, he was to join me at Acapulco.

Well! he did n't come aboard, and we sailed without him. But it appears now he did attempt to join the ship, but his boat was capsized. There now, don't be alarmed! he was n't drowned, as Patterson can swear to — no, catch *him!* not a hair of him was hurt. But *I* — *I* was bundled off to the end of the earth in Mexico alone, without a cent to bless me. For true as you live, that hound of a captain, when he found, as he thought, that Spencer was nabbed, he just confiscated all his trunks and valuables, and left me in the lurch. If I had not met a man down there that offered to marry me and brought me here, I might have died there, I reckon. But I did, and here I am. I went down there as your husband's sweetheart; I 've come back as the wife of an honest man, and I reckon it 's about square!"

There was something so startlingly frank, so hopelessly self-satisfied, so contagiously good-humored in the woman's perfect moral unconsciousness, that even if Mrs. Tucker had been less preoccupied her resentment would have abated. But her eyes were fixed on the gloomy face of Patterson, who was beginning to unlock the sepulchres of his memory and disinter his deeply buried thoughts.

"You kin bet your whole pile on what this Mrs. Capting Baxter — ez used to be French Inez of New Orleans — hez told ye. Ye kin take everything she 's onloaded. And it 's only doin' the square thing to her to say, she hain't done it out o' no cussedness, but just to satisfy herself, now she 's a married woman and past such foolishness. But that ain't neither here nor there. The gist of the whole matter is that Spencer Tucker was at the tienda the day after she sailed and after his boat capsized." He then gave a detailed account of the interview, with the unnecessary but truthful minutiæ of his class, adding to the particulars already known that the following week he visited the Summit House, and was surprised to find that Spencer had never been there, nor had he ever sailed from Monterey.

"But why was this not told to me before?" said Mrs. Tucker suddenly. "Why not at the time? Why," she demanded almost fiercely, turning from the one to the other, "has this been kept from me?"

"I 'll tell ye why," said Patterson, sinking with crushed submission into a chair. "When I found he was n't where he ought to be, I got to lookin' elsewhere. I knew the track of the hoss I lent him by a loose shoe. I examined, and found he had turned off the highroad somewhere beyond the lagoon, jist as if he was makin' a bee-line here."

"Well," said Mrs. Tucker breathlessly.

"Well," said Patterson, with the resigned tone of an accustomed martyr, "mebbe I 'm a God-forsaken idiot, but I reckon he *did* come yer. And mebbe I 'm that much of a habitooal lunatic but, thinking so, I calkilated you 'd know it without tellin'."

With their eyes fixed upon her, Mrs. Tucker felt the quick blood rush to her cheeks, although she knew not why. But they were apparently satisfied with her ignorance, for Patterson resumed, yet more gloomily: —

"Then if he was n't hidin' here beknownst to you, he must have changed his mind agin, and got away by the embarcadero. The only thing wantin' to prove that idea is to know how he got a boat, and what he did with the hoss. And thar 's one more idea, and ez that can't be proved," continued Patterson, sinking his voice still lower, "mebbe it 's accordin' to God's laws."

Unsympathetic to her as the speaker had always been and still was, Mrs. Tucker felt a vague chill creep over her, that seemed to be the result of his manner more than his words. "And that idea is" — she suggested with pale lips.

"It 's this! Fust, I don't say it means much to anybody but me. I 've heard of these warnings afore now, ez comin' only to folks ez hear them for themselves alone, and

I reckon I kin stand it, if it 's the will o' God. The idea is then — that — Spencer Tucker — *was drownded* in that boat; the idea is " — his voice was almost lost in a hoarse whisper — " that it was no living man that kem to me that night, but a spirit that kem out of the darkness and went back into it! No eye saw him but mine; no ears heard him but mine. I reckon it were n't intended it should." He paused, and passed the flap of his hat across his eyes. " The pie, you 'll say, is agin it," he continued in the same tone of voice; " the whiskey is agin it; a few cuss words that dropped from him, accidental like, may have been agin it. All the same they mout have been only the little signs and tokens that it was him."

But Mrs. Baxter's ready laugh somewhat rudely dispelled the infection of Patterson's gloom. " I reckon the only spirit was that which you and Spencer consumed," she said cheerfully. " I don't wonder you 're a little mixed. Like as not you 've misunderstood his plans."

Patterson shook his head. " He 'll turn up yet, alive and kicking! Like as not, then, Poindexter knows where he is all the time."

" Impossible! He would have told me," said Mrs. Tucker quickly.

Mrs. Baxter looked at Patterson without speaking. Patterson replied by a long lugubrious whistle.

" I don't understand you," said Mrs. Tucker, drawing back with cold dignity.

" You don't? " returned Mrs. Baxter. " Bless your innocent heart! Why was he so keen to hunt me up at first, shadowing my friends and all that, and why has he dropped it now he knows I 'm here, if he did n't know where Spencer was? "

" I can explain that," interrupted Mrs. Tucker hastily, with a blush of confusion. " That is — I " —

" Then mebbe you kin explain too," broke in Patterson

with gloomy significance, "why he has bought up most of Spencer's debts himself, and perhaps you 're satisfied it *is* n't to hold the whip hand of him and keep him from coming back openly. P'r'aps you know why he 's movin' heaven and earth to make Don José Santierra sell the ranch, and why the don don't see it all."

"Don José sell Los Cuervos! Buy it, you mean?" said Mrs. Tucker. "*I* offered to sell it to him."

Patterson arose from the chair, looked despairingly around him, passed his hand sadly across his forehead, and said: "It 's come! I knew it would. It 's the warning! It 's suthing betwixt jim-jams and doddering idjiocy. Here I 'd hev been willin' to swear that Mrs. Baxter here told me *she* had sold this yer ranch nearly two years ago to Don José, and now you" —

"Stop!" said Mrs. Tucker, in a voice that chilled them.

She was standing upright and rigid, as if stricken to stone. "I command you to tell me what this means!" she said, turning only her blazing eyes upon the woman.

Even the ready smile faded from Mrs. Baxter's lips as she replied hesitatingly and submissively: "I thought you knew already that Spencer had given this ranch to me. I sold it to Don José to get the money for us to go away with. It was Spencer's idea" —

"You lie!" said Mrs. Tucker.

There was a dead silence. The wrathful blood that had quickly mounted to Mrs. Baxter's cheek, to Patterson's additional bewilderment, faded as quickly. She did not lift her eyes again to Mrs. Tucker's, but, slowly raising herself from her seat, said, "I wish to God I did lie; but it 's true. And it 's true that I never touched a cent of the money, but gave it all to him!" She laid her hand on Patterson's arm, and said, "Come! let us go," and led him a few steps toward the gateway. But here Patterson paused, and again passed his hand over his melancholy brow. The necessity of

coherently and logically closing the conversation impressed itself upon his darkening mind. "Then you don't happen to have heard anything of Spencer?" he said sadly, and vanished with Mrs. Baxter through the gate.

Left alone to herself, Mrs. Tucker raised her hands above her head with a little cry, interlocked her rigid fingers, and slowly brought her palms down upon her upturned face and eyes, pressing hard as if to crush out all light and sense of life before her. She stood thus for a moment motionless and silent, with the rising wind whispering without and flecking her white morning dress with gusty shadows from the arbor. Then, with closed eyes, dropping her hands to her breast, still pressing hard, she slowly passed them down the shapely contours of her figure to the waist, and with another cry cast them off as if she were stripping herself of some loathsome garment. Then she walked quickly to the gateway, looked out, returned to the corridor, unloosening and taking off her wedding-ring from her finger as she walked. Here she paused, then slowly and deliberately rearranged the chairs and adjusted the gay-colored rugs that draped them, and quietly reëntered her chamber.

Two days afterwards the sweating steed of Captain Poindexter was turned loose in the corral, and a moment later the captain entered the corridor. Handing a letter to the decrepit Concha, who seemed to be utterly disorganized by its contents and the few curt words with which it was delivered, he gazed silently upon the vacant bower, still fresh and redolent with the delicacy and perfume of its graceful occupant, until his dark eyes filled with unaccustomed moisture. But his reverie was interrupted by the sound of jingling spurs without, and the old humor struggled back into his eyes as Don José impetuously entered. The Spaniard started back, but instantly recovered himself.

"So, I find you here. Ah! it is well!" he said passionately, producing a letter from his bosom. "Look! Do you call this honor? Look how you keep your compact!"

Poindexter coolly took the letter. It contained a few words of gentle dignity from Mrs. Tucker, informing Don José that she had only that instant learned of his just claims upon Los Cuervos, tendering him her gratitude for his delicate intentions, but pointing out with respectful firmness that he must know that a moment's further acceptance of his courtesy was impossible.

"She has gained this knowledge from no word of mine," said Poindexter calmly. "Right or wrong, I have kept my promise to you. I have as much reason to accuse you of betraying my secret in this," he added coldly, as he took another letter from his pocket, and handed it to Don José.

It seemed briefer and colder, but was neither. It reminded Poindexter that as he had again deceived her she must take the government of her affairs in her own hands henceforth. She abandoned all the furniture and improvements she had put in Los Cuervos to him, to whom she now knew she was indebted for them. She could not thank him for what his habitual generosity impelled him to do for any woman, but she could forgive him for misunderstanding her like any other woman, perhaps she should say, like a child. When he received this she would be already on her way to her old home in Kentucky, where she still hoped to be able by her own efforts to amass enough to discharge her obligations to him.

"She does not speak of her husband, this woman," said Don José, scanning Poindexter's face. "It is possible she rejoins him, eh?"

"Perhaps in one way she has never left him, Don José," said Poindexter, with grave significance.

Don José's face flushed, but he returned carelessly, "And the rancho — naturally you will not buy it now?"

"On the contrary, I shall abide by my offer," said Poindexter quietly.

Don José eyed him narrowly, and then said, "Ah, we shall consider of it."

He did consider it, and accepted the offer. With the full control of the land, Captain Poindexter's improvements, so indefinitely postponed, were actively pushed forward. The thick walls of the hacienda were the first to melt away before them; the low lines of corral were effaced, and the early breath of the summer trade-winds swept uninterruptedly across the now leveled plain to the embarcadero, where a newer structure arose. A more vivid green alone marked the spot where the crumbling adobe walls of the casa had returned to the parent soil that gave it. The channel was deepened, the lagoon was drained, until one evening the magic mirror that had so long reflected the weary waiting of the Blue Grass Penelope lay dull, dead, lustreless, an opaque quagmire of noisome corruption and decay to be put away from the sight of man forever. On this spot the crows, the titular tenants of Los Cuervos, assembled in tumultuous congress, coming and going in mysterious clouds, or laboring in thick and writhing masses, as if they were continuing the work of improvement begun by human agency. So well had they done the work that by the end of a week only a few scattered white objects remained glittering on the surface of the quickly drying soil. But they were the bones of the missing outcast, Spencer Tucker!

. . . . . .

The same spring a breath of war swept over a foul, decaying quagmire of the whole land, before which such passing deeds as these were blown as vapor. It called men of all rank and condition to battle for a nation's life, and among the first to respond were those into whose boyish

ad been placed the nation's honor. It returned the
to Poindexter's shoulder with the addition of a
star, carried him triumphantly to the front, and left
the end of a summer's day and a hard-won fight,
wounded, at the door of a Blue Grass farmhouse.
woman who sought him out and ministered to his
aid timidly, as she left her hand in his, "I told you
I live to repay you."

LEFT OUT ON LONE STAR MOUNTAIN

I

THERE was little doubt that the Lone Star claim was "played out." Not dug out, worked out, washed out, but *played* out. For two years its five sanguine proprietors had gone through the various stages of mining enthusiasm; had prospected and planned, dug and doubted. They had borrowed money with hearty but unredeeming frankness, established a credit with unselfish abnegation of all responsibility, and had borne the disappointment of their creditors with a cheerful resignation which only the consciousness of some deep Compensating Future could give. Giving little else, however, a singular dissatisfaction obtained with the traders, and, being accompanied with a reluctance to make further advances, at last touched the gentle stoicism of the proprietors themselves. The youthful enthusiasm which had at first lifted the most ineffectual trial, the most useless essay, to the plane of actual achievement died out, leaving them only the dull, prosaic record of half-finished ditches, purposeless shafts, untenable pits, abandoned engines, and meaningless disruptions of the soil upon the Lone Star claim, and empty flour sacks and pork barrels in the Lone Star cabin.

They had borne their poverty, if that term could be applied to a light renunciation of all superfluities in food, dress, or ornament, ameliorated by the gentle depredations already alluded to, with unassuming levity. More than that: having segregated themselves from their fellow miners of Red Gulch, and entered upon the possession of the little manzanita-thicketed valley five miles away, the failure of their enterprise

had assumed in their eyes only the vague significance of the decline and fall of a general community, and to that extent relieved them of individual responsibility. It was easier for them to admit that the Lone Star claim was "played out" than confess to a personal bankruptcy. Moreover, they still retained the sacred right of criticism of government, and rose superior in their private opinions to their own collective wisdom. Each one experienced a grateful sense of the entire responsibility of the other four in the fate of their enterprise.

On December 24, 1863, a gentle rain was still falling over the length and breadth of the Lone Star claim. It had been falling for several days, had already called a faint spring color to the wan landscape, repairing with tender touches the ravages wrought by the proprietors, or charitably covering their faults. The ragged seams in gulch and cañon lost their harsh outlines, a thin green mantle faintly clothed the torn and abraded hillside. A few weeks more, and a veil of forgetfulness would be drawn over the feeble failures of the Lone Star claim. The charming derelicts themselves, listening to the raindrops on the roof of their little cabin, gazed philosophically from the open door, and accepted the prospect as a moral discharge from their obligations. Four of the five partners were present. The Right and Left Bowers, Union Mills, and the Judge.

It is scarcely necessary to say that not one of these titles was the genuine name of its possessor. The Right and Left Bowers were two brothers; their sobriquets, a cheerful adaptation from the favorite game of euchre, expressing their relative value in the camp. The mere fact that Union Mills had at one time patched his trousers with an old flour sack legibly bearing that brand of its fabrication, was a tempting baptismal suggestion that the other partners could not forego. The Judge, a singularly inequitable Missourian, with no knowledge whatever of the law, was an inspiration of gratuitous irony.

Union Mills, who had been for some time sitting placidly on the threshold with one leg exposed to the rain, from a sheer indolent inability to change his position, finally withdrew that weather-beaten member, and stood up. The movement more or less deranged the attitudes of the other partners, and was received with cynical disfavor. It was somewhat remarkable that, although generally giving the appearance of healthy youth and perfect physical condition, they one and all simulated the decrepitude of age and invalidism, and after limping about for a few moments, settled back again upon their bunks and stools in their former positions. The Left Bower lazily replaced a bandage that he had worn around his ankle for weeks without any apparent necessity, and the Judge scrutinized with tender solicitude the faded cicatrix of a scratch upon his arm. A passive hypochondria, born of their isolation, was the last ludicrously pathetic touch of their situation.

The immediate cause of this commotion felt the necessity of an explanation.

"It would have been just as easy for you to have stayed outside with your business leg, instead of dragging it into private life in that obtrusive way," retorted the Right Bower; "but that exhaustive effort is n't going to fill the pork barrel. The grocery man at Dalton says — What 's that he said?" he appealed lazily to the Judge.

"Said he reckoned the Lone Star was about played out, and he did n't want any more in his — thank you!" repeated the Judge with a mechanical effort of memory utterly devoid of personal or present interest.

"I always suspected that man, after Grimshaw begun to deal with him," said the Left Bower. "They 're just mean enough to join hands against us." It was a fixed belief of the Lone Star partners that they were pursued by personal enmities.

"More than likely those new strangers over in the Fork

have been paying cash and filled him up with conceit," said Union Mills, trying to dry his leg by alternately beating it or rubbing it against the cabin wall. "Once begin wrong with that kind of snipe, and you drag everybody down with you."

This vague conclusion was received with dead silence. Everybody had become interested in the speaker's peculiar method of drying his leg, to the exclusion of the previous topic. A few offered criticism, no one assistance.

"Who did the grocery man say that to?" asked the Right Bower, finally returning to the question.

"The Old Man," answered the Judge.

"Of course," ejaculated the Right Bower sarcastically.

"Of course," echoed the other partners together. "That's like him. The Old Man all over!"

It did not appear exactly what was like the Old Man, or why it was like him, but generally that he alone was responsible for the grocery man's defection. It was put more concisely by Union Mills.

"That comes of letting him go there! It's just a fair provocation to any man to have the Old Man sent to him. They can't, sorter, restrain themselves at him. He's enough to spoil the credit of the Rothschilds."

"That's so," chimed in the Judge. "And look at his prospecting. Why, he was out two nights last week, all night, prospecting in the moonlight for blind leads, just out of sheer foolishness."

"It was quite enough for me," broke in the Left Bower, "when the other day — you remember when — he proposed to us white men to settle down to plain ground sluicing, making 'grub' wages just like any Chinaman. It just showed his idea of the Lone Star claim."

"Well, I never said it afore," added Union Mills, "but when that one of the Mattison boys came over here to examine the claim with an eye to purchasin', it was the

Old Man that took the conceit out of him. He just as good as admitted that a lot of work had got to be done afore any pay ore could be realized. Never even asked him over to the shanty here to jine us in a friendly game; just kept him, so to speak, to himself. And naturally the Mattisons did n't see it."

A silence followed, broken only by the rain monotonously falling on the roof, and occasionally through the broad adobe chimney, where it provoked a retaliating hiss and splutter from the dying embers of the hearth. The Right Bower, with a sudden access of energy, drew the empty barrel before him, and taking a pack of well-worn cards from his pocket, began to make a "solitaire" upon the lid. The others gazed at him with languid interest.

"Makin' it for anythin' ?" asked Mills.

The Right Bower nodded.

The Judge and Left Bower, who were partly lying in their respective bunks, sat up to get a better view of the game. Union Mills slowly disengaged himself from the wall, and leaned over the "solitaire" player. The Right Bower turned the last card in a pause of almost thrilling suspense, and clapped it down on the lid with fateful emphasis.

"It went!" said the Judge in a voice of hushed respect. "What did you make it for ?" he almost whispered.

"To know if we 'd make the break we talked about and vamose the ranch. It 's the *fifth* time to-day," continued the Right Bower, in a voice of gloomy significance. "And it went agin bad cards too."

"I ain't superstitious," said the Judge, with awe and fatuity beaming from every line of his credulous face, "but it 's flyin' in the face of Providence to go agin such signs as that."

"Make it again, to see if the Old Man must go," suggested the Left Bower.

The suggestion was received with favor, the three men gathering breathlessly around the player. Again the fateful cards were shuffled deliberately, placed in their mysterious combination, with the same ominous result. Yet everybody seemed to breathe more freely, as if relieved from some responsibility, the Judge accepting this manifest expression of Providence with resigned self-righteousness.

"Yes, gentlemen," resumed the Left Bower serenely, as if a calm legal decision had just been recorded, "we must not let any foolishness or sentiment get mixed up with this thing, but look at it like business men. The only sensible move is to get up and get out of the camp."

"And the Old Man?" queried the Judge.

"The Old Man — Hush! he's coming."

The doorway was darkened by a slight lissome shadow. It was the absent partner, otherwise known as the "Old Man." Need it be added that he was a *boy* of nineteen, with a slight down just clothing his upper lip!

"The creek is up over the ford, and I had to 'shin' up a willow on the bank and swing myself across," he said, with a quick, frank laugh; "but all the same, boys, it's going to clear up in about an hour, you bet. It's breaking away over Bald Mountain, and there's a sun-flash on a bit of snow on Lone Peak. Look! you can see it from here. It's for all the world like Noah's dove just landed on Mount Ararat. It's a good omen."

From sheer force of habit the men had momentarily brightened up at the Old Man's entrance. But the unblushing exhibition of degrading superstition shown in the last sentence recalled their just severity. They exchanged meaning glances. Union Mills uttered hopelessly to himself: "Hell's full of such omens."

Too occupied with his subject to notice this ominous reception, the Old Man continued: "I reckon I struck a fresh lead in the new grocery man at the Crossing. He says he'll

let the Judge have a pair of boots on credit, but he can't send them over here; and considering that the Judge has got to try them anyway, it don't seem to be asking too much for the Judge to go over there. He says he 'll give us a barrel of pork and a bag of flour if we 'll give him the right of using our tail-race and clean out the lower end of it."

"It 's the work of a Chinaman, and a four days' job," broke in the Left Bower.

"It took one white man only two hours to clean out a third of it," retorted the Old Man triumphantly, "for *I* pitched in at once with a pick he let me have on credit, and did that amount of work this morning, and told him the rest of you boys would finish it this afternoon."

A slight gesture from the Right Bower checked an angry exclamation from the Left. The Old Man did not notice either, but, knitting his smooth young brow in a paternally reflective fashion, went on: "You 'll have to get a new pair of trousers, Mills, but as he does n't keep clothing, we 'll have to get some canvas and cut you out a pair. I traded off the beans he let me have for some tobacco for the Right Bower at the other shop, and got them to throw in a new pack of cards. These are about played out. We 'll be wanting some brushwood for the fire; there 's a heap in the hollow. Who 's going to bring it in? It 's the Judge's turn, is n't it? Why, what 's the matter with you all?"

The restraint and evident uneasiness of his companions had at last touched him. He turned his frank young eyes upon them; they glanced helplessly at each other. Yet his first concern was for them, his first instinct paternal and protecting. He ran his eyes quickly over them; they were all there, and apparently in their usual condition. "Anything wrong with the claim?" he suggested.

Without looking at him the Right Bower rose, leaned against the open door with his hands behind him and his face towards the landscape, and said, apparently to the dis-

tant prospect: "The claim 's played out, the partnership 's played out, and the sooner we skedaddle out of this the better. If," he added, turning to the Old Man, "if *you* want to stay, if you want to do Chinaman's work at Chinaman's wages, if you want to hang on to the charity of the traders at the Crossing, you can do it, and enjoy the prospects and the Noah's doves alone. But we 're calculatin' to step out of it."

"But I have n't said I wanted to do it *alone*," protested the Old Man with a gesture of bewilderment.

"If these are your general ideas of the partnership," continued the Right Bower, clinging to the established hypothesis of the other partners for support, "it ain't ours, and the only way we can prove it is to stop the foolishness right here. We calculated to dissolve the partnership and strike out for ourselves elsewhere. You 're no longer responsible for us, nor we for you. And we reckon it 's the square thing to leave you the claim and the cabin and all it contains. To prevent any trouble with the traders, we 've drawn up a paper here" —

"With a bonus of fifty thousand dollars each down, and the rest to be settled on my children," interrupted the Old Man, with a half-uneasy laugh. "Of course. But" — he stopped suddenly, the blood dropped from his fresh cheek, and he again glanced quickly round the group. "I don't think — I — I quite sabe, boys," he added, with a slight tremor of voice and lip. "If it 's a conundrum, ask me an easier one."

Any lingering doubt he might have had of their meaning was dispelled by the Judge. "It 's about the softest thing you kin drop into, Old Man," he said confidentially; "if *I* had n't promised the other boys to go with them, and if I did n't need the best medical advice in Sacramento for my lungs, I 'd just enjoy staying with you."

"It gives a sorter freedom to a young fellow like you,

Old Man, like goin' into the world on your own capital, that every Californian boy has n't got," said Union Mills patronizingly.

"Of course it 's rather hard papers on us, you know, givin' up everything, so to speak; but it 's for your good, and we ain't goin' back on you," said the Left Bower; "are we, boys?"

The color had returned to the Old Man's face a little more quickly and freely than usual. He picked up the hat he had cast down, put it on carefully over his brown curls, drew the flap down on the side towards his companions, and put his hands in his pockets. "All right," he said, in a slightly altered voice. "When do you go?"

"To-day," answered the Left Bower. "We calculate to take a moonlight pasear over to the Cross-Roads and meet the down stage at about twelve to-night. There 's plenty of time yet," he added, with a slight laugh; "it 's only three o'clock now."

There was a dead silence. Even the rain withheld its continuous patter; a dumb, gray film covered the ashes of the hushed hearth. For the first time the Right Bower exhibited some slight embarrassment.

"I reckon it 's held up for a spell," he said, ostentatiously examining the weather, "and we might as well take a run round the claim to see if we 've forgotten nothing. Of course, we 'll be back again," he added hastily, without looking at the Old Man, "before we go, you know."

The others began to look for their hats, but so awkwardly and with such evident preoccupation of mind that it was not at first discovered that the Judge had his already on. This raised a laugh, as did also a clumsy stumble of Union Mills against the pork barrel, although that gentleman took refuge from his confusion and secured a decent retreat by a gross exaggeration of his lameness, as he limped after the Right Bower. The Judge whistled feebly. The

Left Bower, in a more ambitious effort to impart a certain gayety to his exit, stopped on the threshold and said, as if in search confidence to his companions, "Darned if the Old Man don't look two inches higher since he became a proprietor," laughed patronizingly, and vanished.

If the newly made proprietor had increased in stature, he had not otherwise changed his demeanor. He remained in the same attitude until the last figure disappeared behind the fringe of buckeye that hid the distant highway. Then he walked slowly to the fireplace, and, leaning against the chimney, kicked the dying embers together with his foot. Something dropped and spattered in the film of hot ashes. Surely the rain had not yet ceased!

His high color had already fled except for a spot on either cheek-bone that lent a brightness to his eyes. He glanced around the cabin. It looked familiar and yet strange. Rather, it looked strange *because* still familiar, and therefore incongruous with the new atmosphere that surrounded it — discordant with the echo of their last meeting, and painfully accenting the change. There were the four "bunks," or sleeping berths, of his companions, each still bearing some traces of the individuality of its late occupant with a dumb loyalty that seemed to make their light-hearted defection monstrous. In the dead ashes of the Judge's pipe, scattered on his shelf, still lived his old fire; in the whittled and carved edges of the Left Bower's bunk still were the memories of bygone days of delicious indolence; in the bullet-holes clustered round a knot of one of the beams there was still the record of the Right Bower's old-time skill and practice; in the few engravings of female loveliness stuck upon each headboard there were the proofs of their old extravagant devotion — all a mute protest to the change.

He remembered how, a fatherless, truant schoolboy, he had drifted into their adventurous, nomadic life, itself a life

of grown-up truancy like his own, and became one of that gypsy family. How they had taken the place of relations and household in his boyish fancy, filling it with the unsubstantial pageantry of a child's play at grown-up existence, he knew only too well. But how, from being a pet and protégé, he had gradually and unconsciously asserted his own individuality and taken upon his younger shoulders not only a poet's keen appreciation of that life, but its actual responsibilities and half-childish burdens, he never suspected. He had fondly believed that he was a neophyte in their ways, a novice in their charming faith and indolent creed, and they had encouraged it; now their renunciation of that faith could only be an excuse for a renunciation of *him*. The poetry that had for two years invested the material and sometimes even mean details of their existence was too much a part of himself to be lightly dispelled. The lesson of those ingenuous moralists failed, as such lessons are apt to fail; their discipline provoked but did not subdue; a rising indignation, stirred by a sense of injury, mounted to his cheek and eyes. It was slow to come, but was none the less violent that it had been preceded by the benumbing shock of shame and pride.

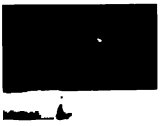
I hope I shall not prejudice the reader's sympathies if my duty as a simple chronicler compels me to state, therefore, that the sober second thought of this gentle poet was to burn down the cabin on the spot with all its contents. This yielded to a milder counsel — waiting for the return of the party, challenging the Right Bower, a duel to the death, perhaps himself the victim, with the crushing explanation *in extremis*, "It seems we are *one* too many. No matter; it is settled now. Farewell!" Dimly remembering, however, that there was something of this in the last well-worn novel they had read together, and that his antagonist might recognize it, or even worse, anticipate it himself, the idea was quickly rejected. Besides, the op-

portunity for an apotheosis of self-sacrifice was past. Nothing remained now but to refuse the proffered bribe of claim and cabin by letter, for he must not wait their return. He tore a leaf from a blotted diary, begun and abandoned long since, and essayed to write. Scrawl after scrawl was torn up, until his fury had cooled down to a frigid third personality. "Mr. John Ford regrets to inform his late partners that their tender of house, of furniture," however, seemed too inconsistent with the pork-barrel table he was writing on; a more eloquent renunciation of their offer became frivolous and idiotic from a caricature of Union Mills, label and all, that appeared suddenly on the other side of the leaf; and when he at last indited a satisfactory and impassioned exposition of his feelings, the legible addendum of "Oh, ain't you glad you're out of the wilderness!" — the forgotten first line of a popular song, which no scratching would erase — seemed too like an ironical postscript to be thought of for a moment. He threw aside his pen, and cast the discordant record of past foolish pastime into the dead ashes of the hearth.

How quiet it was! With the cessation of the rain the wind too had gone down, and scarcely a breath of air came through the open door. He walked to the threshold, and gazed on the hushed prospect. In this listless attitude he was faintly conscious of a distant reverberation, a mere phantom of sound, — perhaps the explosion of a distant blast in the hills, — that left the silence more marked and oppressive. As he turned again into the cabin a change seemed to have come over it. It already looked old and decayed. The loneliness of years of desertion seemed to have taken possession of it; the atmosphere of dry rot was in the beams and rafters. To his excited fancy the few disordered blankets and articles of clothing seemed dropping to pieces; in one of the bunks there was a hideous resemblance in the longitudinal heap of clothing to a withered and mummied

corpse. So it might look in after-years when some passing stranger — But he stopped. A dread of the place was beginning to creep over him; a dread of the days to come, when the monotonous sunshine should lay bare the loneliness of these walls; the long, long days of endless blue and cloudless, overhanging solitude; summer days when the wearying, incessant trade-winds should sing around that empty shell and voice its desolation. He gathered together hastily a few articles that were especially his own — rather that the free communion of the camp, from indifference or accident, had left wholly to him. He hesitated for a moment over his rifle, but, scrupulous in his wounded pride, turned away and left the familiar weapon that in the dark days had so often provided the dinner or breakfast of the little household. Candor compels me to state that his equipment was not large nor eminently practical. His scant pack was a light weight for even his young shoulders, but I fear he thought more of getting away from the Past than providing for the Future.

With this vague but sole purpose he left the cabin, and almost mechanically turned his steps towards the creek he had crossed that morning. He knew that by this route he would avoid meeting his companions; its difficulties and circuitousness would exercise his feverish limbs and give him time for reflection. He had determined to leave the claim, but whence he had not yet considered. He reached the bank of the creek where he had stood two hours before; it seemed to him two years. He looked curiously at his reflection in one of the broad pools of overflow, and fancied he looked older. He watched the rush and outset of the turbid current hurrying to meet the South Fork, and to eventually lose itself in the yellow Sacramento. Even in his preoccupation he was impressed with a likeness to himself and his companions in this flood that had burst its peaceful boundaries. In the drifting fragments of one of



He looked curiously at his reflection

crossed the valley near the cabin, in the growing moonlight. Thus he could avoid encountering them on his way to the highroad, and yet see them, perhaps, for the last time. Even in his sense of injury there was a strange satisfaction in the thought.

The ascent was toilsome, but familiar. All along the dim trail he was accompanied by gentler memories of the past, that seemed, like the faint odor of spiced leaves and fragrant grasses wet with the rain and crushed beneath his ascending tread, to exhale the sweeter perfume in his effort to subdue or rise above them. There was the thicket of manzanita, where they had broken noonday bread together; here was the rock beside their maiden shafts, where they had poured a wild libation in boyish enthusiasm of success; and here the ledge where their first flag, a red shirt heroically sacrificed, was displayed from a long-handled shovel to the gaze of admirers below. When he at last reached the summit, the mysterious hush was still in the air, as if in breathless sympathy with his expedition. In the west, the plain was faintly illuminated, but disclosed no moving figures. He turned towards the rising moon, and moved slowly to the eastern edge. Suddenly he stopped. Another step would have been his last! He stood upon the crumbling edge of a precipice. A landslip had taken place on the eastern flank, leaving the gaunt ribs and fleshless bones of Lone Star Mountain bare in the moonlight. He understood now the strange rumble and reverberation he had heard; he understood now the strange hush of bird and beast in brake and thicket!

Although a single rapid glance convinced him that the slide had taken place in an unfrequented part of the mountain, above an inaccessible cañon, and reflection assured him his companions could not have reached that distance when it took place, a feverish impulse led him to descend a few rods in the track of the avalanche. The frequent recur-

rence of outcrop and angle made this comparatively easy. Here he called aloud; the feeble echo of his own voice seemed only a dull impertinence to the significant silence. He turned to reascend; the furrowed flank of the mountain before him lay full in the moonlight. To his excited fancy a dozen luminous starlike points in the rocky crevices started into life as he faced them. Throwing his arm over the ledge above him, he supported himself for a moment by what appeared to be a projection of the solid rock. It trembled slightly. As he raised himself to its level, his heart stopped beating. If was simply a fragment detached from the outcrop, lying loosely on the ledge but upholding him by *its own weight only*. He examined it with trembling fingers; the encumbering soil fell from its sides and left its smoothed and worn protuberances glistening in the moonlight. It was virgin gold!

Looking back upon that moment afterwards, he remembered that he was not dazed, dazzled, or startled. It did not come to him as a discovery or an accident, a stroke of chance or a caprice of fortune. He saw it all in that supreme moment; Nature had worked out their poor deduction. What their feeble engines had essayed spasmodically and helplessly against the curtain of soil that hid the treasure, the elements had achieved with mightier but more patient forces. The slow sapping of the winter rains had loosened the soil from the auriferous rock, even while the swollen stream was carrying their impotent and shattered engines to the sea. What mattered that his single arm could not lift the treasure he had found; what mattered that to unfix those glittering stars would still tax both skill and patience! The work was done, the goal was reached! Even his boyish impatience was content with that. He rose slowly to his feet, unstrapped his long-handled shovel from his back, secured it in the crevice, and quietly regained the summit.

It was all his own! His own by right of discovery under the law of the land, and without accepting a favor from *them*. He recalled even the fact that it was *his* prospecting on the mountain that first suggested the existence of gold in the outcrop and the use of the hydraulic. *He* had never abandoned that belief, whatever the others had done. He dwelt somewhat indignantly to himself on this circumstance, and half unconsciously faced defiantly towards the plain below. But it was sleeping peacefully in the full sight of the moon, without life or motion. He looked at the stars, it was still far from midnight. His companions had no doubt long since returned to the cabin to prepare for their midnight journey. They were discussing him, perhaps laughing at him, or worse, pitying him and his bargain. Yet here was his bargain! A slight laugh he gave vent to here startled him a little, it sounded so hard and so unmirthful, and so unlike, as he oddly fancied, what he really *thought*. But *what* did he think?

Nothing mean or revengeful; no, they never would say *that*. When he had taken out all the surface gold and put the mine in working order, he would send them each a draft for a thousand dollars. Of course, if they were ever ill or poor he would do more. One of the first, the very first things he should do would be to send them each a handsome gun, and tell them that he only asked in return the old-fashioned rifle that once was his. Looking back at the moment in after-years, he wondered that, with this exception, he made no plans for his own future, or the way he should dispose of his newly acquired wealth. This was the more singular as it had been the custom of the five partners to lie awake at night, audibly comparing with each other what they would do in case they made a strike. He remembered how, Alnaschar-like, they nearly separated once over a difference in the disposal of a hundred thousand dollars that they never had, nor expected to have.

He remembered how Union Mills always began his career as a millionaire by a "square meal" at Delmonico's; how the Right Bower's initial step was always a trip home "to see his mother;" how the Left Bower would immediately placate the parents of his beloved with priceless gifts (it may be parenthetically remarked that the parents and the beloved one were as hypothetical as the fortune); and how the Judge would make his first start as a capitalist by breaking a certain faro bank in Sacramento. He himself had been equally eloquent in extravagant fancy in those penniless days, — he who now was quite cold and impassive beside the more extravagant reality.

How different it might have been! If they had only waited a day longer! if they had only broken their resolves to him kindly and parted in good will! How he would long ere this have rushed to greet them with the joyful news! How they would have danced around it, sung themselves hoarse, laughed down their enemies, and run up the flag triumphantly on the summit of the Lone Star Mountain! How they would have crowned him, the "Old Man," "the hero of the camp"! How he would have told them the whole story; how some strange instinct had impelled him to ascend the summit, and how another step on that summit would have precipitated him into the cañon! And how — But what if somebody else, Union Mills or the Judge, had been the first discoverer? Might they not have meanly kept the secret from him; have selfishly helped themselves, and done —

"What *you* are doing now."

The hot blood rushed to his cheek, as if a strange voice were at his ear. For a moment he could not believe that it came from his own pale lips until he found himself speaking. He rose to his feet, tingling with shame, and began hurriedly to descend the mountain.

He would go to them, tell them of his discovery, let them

give him his share, and leave them forever. It was the only thing to be done — strange that he had not thought of it at once. Yet it was hard, very hard and cruel, to be forced to meet them again. What had he done to suffer this mortification? For a moment he actually hated this vulgar treasure that had forever buried under its gross ponderability the light and careless past, and utterly crushed out the poetry of their old, indolent, happy existence.

He was sure to find them waiting at the Cross-Roads where the coach came past. It was three miles away, yet he could get there in time if he hastened. It was a wise and practical conclusion of his evening's work, a lame and impotent conclusion to his evening's indignation. No matter. They would perhaps at first think he had come to weakly follow them, perhaps they would at first doubt his story. No matter. He bit his lips to keep down the foolish rising tears, but still went blindly forward.

He saw not the beautiful night, cradled in the dark hills, swathed in luminous mists, and hushed in the awe of its own loveliness! Here and there the moon had laid her calm face on lake and overflow, and gone to sleep embracing them, until the whole plain seemed to be lifted into infinite quiet. Walking on as in a dream, the black, impenetrable barriers of skirting thickets opened and gave way to vague distances that it appeared impossible to reach, dim vistas that seemed unapproachable. Gradually he seemed himself to become a part of the mysterious night. He was becoming as pulseless, as calm, as passionless.

What was that? A shot in the direction of the cabin! yet so faint, so echoless, so ineffective in the vast silence, that he would have thought it his fancy but for the strange instinctive jar upon his sensitive nerves. Was it an accident, or was it an intentional signal to him? He stopped; it was not repeated; the silence reasserted itself, but this time with an ominous deathlike suggestion. A sudden and

terrible thought crossed his mind. He cast aside his pack and all encumbering weight, took a deep breath, lowered his head, and darted like a deer in the direction of the challenge.

II

The exodus of the seceding partners of the Lone Star claim had been scarcely an imposing one. For the first five minutes after quitting the cabin the procession was straggling and vagabond. Unwonted exertion had exaggerated the lameness of some, and feebleness of moral purpose had predisposed the others to obtrusive musical exhibition. Union Mills limped and whistled with affected abstraction; the Judge whistled and limped with affected earnestness. The Right Bower led the way with some show of definite design; the Left Bower followed with his hands in his pockets. The two feebler natures, drawn together in unconscious sympathy, looked vaguely at each other for support.

"You see," said the Judge suddenly, as if triumphantly concluding an argument, "there ain't anything better for a young fellow than independence. Nature, so to speak, points the way. Look at the animals."

"There 's a skunk hereabouts," said Union Mills, who was supposed to be gifted with aristocratically sensitive nostrils, "within ten miles of this place; like as not crossing the Ridge. It 's always my luck to happen out just at such times. I don't see the necessity anyhow of trapesing round the claim now, if we calculate to leave it to-night."

Both men waited to observe if the suggestion was taken up by the Right and Left Bowers moodily plodding ahead. No response following, the Judge shamelessly abandoned his companion.

"You would n't stand snoopin' round instead of lettin' the Old Man get used to the idea alone? No; I could see

all along that he was takin' it in, takin' it in kindly but slowly, and I reckoned the best thing for us to do was to git up and git until he 'd got round it." The Judge's voice was slightly raised for the benefit of the two before him.

"Did n't he say," remarked the Right Bower, stopping suddenly and facing the others, "did n't he say that that new trader was goin' to let him have some provisions anyway ? "

Union Mills turned appealingly to the Judge; that gentleman was forced to reply, "Yes; I remember distinctly he said it. It was one of the things I was particular about on his account," responded the Judge, with the air of having arranged it all himself with the new trader. "I remember I was easier in my mind about it."

"But did n't he say," queried the Left Bower, also stopping short, "suthin' about its being contingent on our doing some work on the race ? "

The Judge turned for support to Union Mills, who, however, under the hollow pretense of preparing for a long conference, had luxuriously seated himself on a stump. The Judge sat down also, and replied hesitatingly, "Well, yes! Us or him."

"Us or him," repeated the Right Bower, with gloomy irony. "And you ain't quite clear in your mind, are you, if *you* have n't done the work already ? You 're just killing yourself with this spontaneous, promiscuous, and premature overwork; that 's what 's the matter with you."

"I reckon I heard somebody say suthin' about its being a Chinaman's three-day job," interpolated the Left Bower, with equal irony; "but I ain't quite clear in my mind about that."

"It 'll be a sorter distraction for the Old Man," said Union Mills feebly, — "kinder take his mind off his loneliness."

Nobody taking the least notice of the remark, Union

Mills stretched out his legs more comfortably and took out his pipe. He had scarcely done so when the Right Bower, wheeling suddenly, set off in the direction of the creek. The Left Bower, after a slight pause, followed without a word. The Judge, wisely conceiving it better to join the stronger party, ran feebly after him, and left Union Mills to bring up a weak and vacillating rear.

Their course, diverging from Lone Star Mountain, led them now directly to the bend of the creek, the base of their old ineffectual operations. Here was the beginning of the famous tail-race that skirted the new trader's claim, and then lost its way in a swampy hollow. It was choked with débris; a thin, yellow stream that once ran through it seemed to have stopped work when they did, and gone into greenish liquidation.

They had scarcely spoken during this brief journey, and had received no other explanation from the Right Bower, who led them, than that afforded by his mute example when he reached the race. Leaping into it without a word, he at once began to clear away the broken timbers and driftwood. Fired by the spectacle of what appeared to be a new and utterly frivolous game, the men gayly leaped after him, and were soon engaged in a fascinating struggle with the impeded race. The Judge forgot his lameness in springing over a broken sluice-box; Union Mills forgot his whistle in a happy imitation of a Chinese coolie's song. Nevertheless, after ten minutes of this mild dissipation, the pastime flagged; Union Mills was beginning to rub his leg, when a distant rumble shook the earth. The men looked at each other; the diversion was complete; a languid discussion of the probabilities of its being an earthquake or a blast followed, in the midst of which the Right Bower, who was working a little in advance of the others, uttered a warning cry and leaped from the race. His companions had barely time to follow before a sudden and inexplicable rise in the

waters of the creek sent a swift irruption of the flood through the race. In an instant its choked and impeded channel was cleared, the race was free, and the scattered débris of logs and timber floated upon its easy current. Quick to take advantage of this labor-saving phenomenon, the Lone Star partners sprang into the water, and by disentangling and directing the eddying fragments completed their work.

"The Old Man oughter been here to see this," said the Left Bower; "it's just one o' them climaxes of poetic justice he's always huntin' up. It's easy to see what's happened. One o' them high-toned shrimps over in the Excelsior claim has put a blast in too near the creek. He's tumbled the bank into the creek, and sent the backwater down here just to wash out our race. That's what I call poetical retribution."

"And who was it advised us to dam the creek below the race and make it do the thing?" asked the Right Bower moodily.

"That was one of the Old Man's ideas, I reckon," said the Left Bower dubiously.

"And you remember," broke in the Judge with animation, "I allus said, 'Go slow, go slow. You just hold on, and suthin' will happen.' And," he added triumphantly, "you see suthin' *has* happened. I don't want to take credit to myself, but I reckoned on them Excelsior boys bein' fools, and took the chances."

"And what if I happen to know that the Excelsior boys ain't blastin' to-day?" said the Right Bower sarcastically.

As the Judge had evidently based his hypothesis on the alleged fact of a blast, he deftly evaded the point. "I ain't sayin' the Old Man's head ain't level on some things; he wants a little more sabe of the world. He's improved a good deal in euchre lately, and in poker — well! he's got that sorter dreamy, listenin'-to-the-angels kind o' way that

you can't exactly tell whether he's bluffin' or has got a full hand. Has n't he ? " he asked, appealing to Union Mills.

But that gentleman, who had been watching the dark face of the Right Bower, preferred to take what he believed to be his cue from him. " That ain't the question," he said virtuously ; " we ain't takin' this step to make a card-sharp out of him. We 're not doin' Chinamen's work in this race to-day for that. No, sir ! We 're teachin' him to paddle his own canoe." Not finding the sympathetic response he looked for in the Right Bower's face, he turned to the Left.

" I reckon we were teachin' him our canoe was too full," was the Left Bower's unexpected reply. " That 's about the size of it."

The Right Bower shot a rapid glance under his brows at his brother. The latter, with his hands in his pockets, stared unconsciously at the rushing water, and then quietly turned away. The Right Bower followed him. " Are you goin' back on us ? " he asked.

" Are *you ?* " responded the other.

" No ! "

" *No,* then, it is," returned the Left Bower quietly. The elder brother hesitated in half-angry embarrassment.

" Then what did you mean by saying we reckoned our canoe was too full ? "

" Was n't that our idea ? " returned the Left Bower indifferently. Confounded by this practical expression of his own unformulated good intentions, the Right Bower was staggered.

" Speakin' of the Old Man," broke in the Judge, with characteristic infelicity, " I reckon he 'll sort o' miss us, times like these. We were allers runnin' him and bedevlin' him, after work, just to get him excited and amusin', and he 'll kinder miss that sort o' stimulatin'. I reckon we 'll miss it too, somewhat. Don't you remember, boys, the night we put up that little sell on him and made him

believe we 'd struck it rich in the bank of the creek, and got him so conceited he wanted to go off and settle all our debts at once ? "

" And how I came bustin' into the cabin with a pan full of iron pyrites and black sand," chuckled Union Mills, continuing the reminiscences, " and how them big gray eyes of his nearly bulged out of his head. Well, it 's some satisfaction to know we did our duty by the young fellow even in those little things." He turned for confirmation of their general disinterestedness to the Right Bower, but he was already striding away, uneasily conscious of the lazy following of the Left Bower, like a laggard conscience at his back. This movement again threw Union Mills and the Judge into feeble complicity in the rear, as the procession slowly straggled homeward from the creek.

Night had fallen. Their way lay through the shadow of Lone Star Mountain, deepened here and there by the slight, bosky ridges that, starting from its base, crept across the plain like vast roots of its swelling trunk. The shadows were growing blacker as the moon began to assert itself over the rest of the valley, when the Right Bower halted suddenly on one of these ridges. The Left Bower lounged up to him, and stopped also, while the two others came up and completed the group.

" There 's no light in the shanty," said the Right Bower in a low voice, half to himself and half in answer to their inquiring attitude. The men followed the direction of his finger. In the distance the black outline of the Lone Star cabin stood out distinctly in the illumined space. There was the black, sightless, external glitter of moonlight on its two windows that seemed to reflect its dim vacancy, empty alike of light and warmth and motion.

" That 's sing'lar," said the Judge in an awed whisper.

The Left Bower, by simply altering the position of his hands in his trousers' pockets, managed to suggest that he

knew perfectly the meaning of it, had always known it; but that being now, so to speak, in the hands of Fate, he was callous to it. This much, at least, the elder brother read in his attitude. But anxiety at that moment was the controlling impulse of the Right Bower, as a certain superstitious remorse was the instinct of the two others; and without heeding the cynic, the three started at a rapid pace for the cabin.

They reached it silently, as the moon, now riding high in the heavens, seemed to touch it with the tender grace and hushed repose of a tomb. It was with something of this feeling that the Right Bower softly pushed open the door; it was with something of this dread that the two others lingered on the threshold, until the Right Bower, after vainly trying to stir the dead embers on the hearth into life with his foot, struck a match and lit their solitary candle. Its flickering light revealed the familiar interior unchanged in aught but one thing. The bunk that the Old Man had occupied was stripped of its blankets; the few cheap ornaments and photographs were gone; the rude poverty of the bare boards and scant pallet looked up at them unrelieved by the bright face and gracious youth that had once made them tolerable. In the grim irony of that exposure, their own penury was doubly conscious. The little knapsack, the tea-cup, and coffee-pot that had hung near his bed were gone also. The most indignant protest, the most pathetic of the letters he had composed and rejected, whose torn fragments still littered the floor, could never have spoken with the eloquence of this empty space! The men exchanged no words; the solitude of the cabin, instead of drawing them together, seemed to isolate each one in selfish distrust of the others. Even the unthinking garrulity of Union Mills and the Judge was checked. A moment later, when the Left Bower entered the cabin, his presence was scarcely noticed.

The silence was broken by a joyous exclamation from the Judge. He had discovered the Old Man's rifle in the corner, where it had been at first overlooked. "He ain't gone yet, gentlemen — for yer 's his rifle," he broke in, with a feverish return of volubility, and a high excited falsetto. "He would n't have left this behind. No! I knowed it from the first. He 's just outside a bit, foraging for wood and water. No, sir! Coming along here I said to Union Mills — did n't I? — 'Bet your life the Old Man 's not far off, even if he ain't in the cabin.' Why, the moment I stepped foot" —

"And I said coming along," interrupted Union Mills, with equally reviving mendacity, 'Like as not he 's hangin' round yer and lyin' low just to give us a surprise.' He! ho!"

"He 's gone for good, and he left that rifle here on purpose," said the Left Bower in a low voice, taking the weapon almost tenderly in his hands.

"Drop it, then!" said the Right Bower. The voice was that of his brother, but suddenly changed with passion. The two other partners drew back in alarm.

"I 'll not leave it here for the first comer," said the Left Bower calmly, "because we 've been fools, and he, too. It 's too good a weapon for that."

"Drop it, I say!" said the Right Bower, with a savage stride towards him.

The younger brother brought the rifle to a half charge with a white face but a steady eye.

"Stop where you are!" he said collectedly. "Don't row with *me*, because you have n't either the grit to stick to your ideas or the heart to confess them wrong. We 've followed your lead, and — here we are! The camp 's broken up — the Old Man 's gone — and we 're going. And as for the d—d rifle" —

"Drop it, do you hear!" shouted the Right Bower,

clinging to that one idea with the blind pertinacity of rage and a losing cause. "Drop it!"

The Left Bower drew back, but his brother had seized the barrel with both hands. There was a momentary struggle, a flash through the half-lighted cabin, and a shattering report. The two men fell back from each other; the rifle dropped on the floor between them.

The whole thing was over so quickly that the other two partners had not had time to obey their common impulse to separate them, and consequently even now could scarcely understand what had passed. It was over so quickly that the two actors themselves walked back to their places, scarcely realizing their own act.

A dead silence followed. The Judge and Union Mills looked at each other in dazed astonishment, and then nervously set about their former habits, apparently in that fatuous belief common to such natures, that they were ignoring a painful situation. The Judge drew the barrel towards him, picked up the cards, and began mechanically to "make a patience," on which Union Mills gazed with ostentatious interest, but with eyes furtively conscious of the rigid figure of the Right Bower by the chimney and the abstracted face of the Left Bower at the door. Ten minutes had passed in this occupation, the Judge and Union Mills conversing in the furtive whispers of children unavoidably but fascinatedly present at a family quarrel, when a light step was heard upon the crackling brushwood outside, and the bright panting face of the Old Man appeared upon the threshold. There was a shout of joy; in another moment he was half buried in the bosom of the Right Bower's shirt, half dragged into the lap of the Judge, upsetting the barrel, and completely encompassed by the Left Bower and Union Mills. With the enthusiastic utterance of his name the spell was broken.

Happily unconscious of the previous excitement that had

provoked this spontaneous unanimity of greeting, the Old Man, equally relieved, at once broke into a feverish announcement of his discovery. He painted the details, with, I fear, a slight exaggeration of coloring, due partly to his own excitement, and partly to justify their own. But he was strangely conscious that these bankrupt men appeared less elated with their personal interest in their stroke of fortune than with his own success. "I told you he 'd do it," said the Judge, with a reckless unscrupulousness of the statement that carried everybody with it; "look at him! the game little pup." "Oh, no! he ain't the right breed, is he?" echoed Union Mills with arch irony, while the Right and Left Bower, grasping either hand, pressed a proud but silent greeting that was half new to him, but wholly delicious. It was not without difficulty that he could at last prevail upon them to return with him to the scene of his discovery, or even then restrain them from attempting to carry him thither on their shoulders on the plea of his previous prolonged exertions. Once only there was a momentary embarrassment. "Then you fired that shot to bring me back?" said the Old Man gratefully. In the awkward silence that followed, the hands of the two brothers sought and grasped each other penitently. "Yes," interposed the Judge, with delicate tact, "ye see the Right and Left Bower almost quarreled to see which should be the first to fire for ye. I disremember which did" — "I never touched the trigger," said the Left Bower hastily. With a hurried backward kick, the Judge resumed, "It went off sorter spontaneous."

The difference in the sentiment of the procession that once more issued from the Lone Star cabin did not fail to show itself in each individual partner according to his temperament. The subtle tact of Union Mills, however, in expressing an awakened respect for their fortunate partner by addressing him, as if unconsciously, as "Mr. Ford"

was at first discomposing, but even this was forgotten in their breathless excitement as they neared the base of the mountain. When they had crossed the creek the Right Bower stopped reflectively.

"You say you heard the slide come down before you left the cabin?" he said, turning to the Old Man.

"Yes; but I did not know then what it was. It was about an hour and a half after you left," was the reply.

"Then look here, boys," continued the Right Bower with superstitious exultation; "it was the *slide* that tumbled into the creek, overflowed it, and helped *us* clear out the race!"

It seemed so clear that Providence had taken the partners of the Lone Star directly in hand that they faced the toilsome ascent of the mountain with the assurance of conquerors. They paused only on the summit to allow the Old Man to lead the way to the slope that held their treasure. He advanced cautiously to the edge of the crumbling cliff, stopped, looked bewildered, advanced again, and then remained white and immovable. In an instant the Right Bower was at his side.

"Is anything the matter? Don't — don't look so, Old Man, for God's sake!"

The Old Man pointed to the dull, smooth, black side of the mountain, without a crag, break, or protuberance, and said with ashen lips, —

"It's gone!"

. . . . . .

And it was gone! A *second* slide had taken place, stripping the flank of the mountain, and burying the treasure and the weak implement that had marked its side deep under a chaos of rock and débris at its base.

"Thank God!" The blank faces of his companions turned quickly to the Right Bower. "Thank God!" he repeated, with his arm round the neck of the Old Man.

"Had he stayed behind he would have been buried too." He paused, and, pointing solemnly to the depths below, said, "And thank God for showing us where we may yet labor for it in hope and patience like honest men."

The men silently bowed their heads and slowly descended the mountain. But when they had reached the plain one of them called out to the others to watch a star that seemed to be rising and moving towards them over the hushed and sleeping valley.

"It's only the stage-coach, boys," said the Left Bower, smiling; "the coach that was to take us away."

In the security of their new-found fraternity they resolved to wait and see it pass. As it swept by with flash of light, beat of hoofs, and jingle of harness, the only real presence in the dreamy landscape, the driver shouted a hoarse greeting to the phantom partners, audible only to the Judge, who was nearest the vehicle.

"Did you hear — *did* you hear what he said, boys?" he gasped, turning to his companions. "No? Shake hands all round, boys! God bless you all, boys! To think we did n't know it all this while!"

"Know what?"

"Merry Christmas!"

A SHIP OF '49

I

It had rained so persistently in San Francisco during the first week of January, 1854, that a certain quagmire in the roadway of Long Wharf had become impassable, and a plank was thrown over its dangerous depth. Indeed, so treacherous was the spot that it was alleged, on good authority, that a hastily embarking traveler had once hopelessly lost his portmanteau, and was fain to dispose of his entire interest in it for the sum of two dollars and fifty cents to a speculative stranger on the wharf. As the stranger's search was rewarded afterwards only by the discovery of the body of a casual Chinaman, who had evidently endeavored wickedly to anticipate him, a feeling of commercial insecurity was added to the other eccentricities of the locality.

The plank led to the door of a building that was a marvel even in the chaotic frontier architecture of the street. The houses on either side — irregular frames of wood or corrugated iron — bore evidence of having been quickly thrown together, to meet the requirements of the goods and passengers who were once disembarked on what was the muddy beach of the infant city. But the building in question exhibited a certain elaboration of form and design utterly inconsistent with this idea. The structure obtruded a bowed front to the street, with a curving line of small windows, surmounted by elaborate carvings and scrollwork of vines and leaves, while below, in faded gilt letters, appeared the legend "Pontiac — Marseilles." The effect of

this incongruity was startling. It is related that an inebriated miner, impeded by mud and drink before its door, was found gazing at its remarkable façade with an expression of the deepest despondency. "I hev lived a free life, pardner," he explained thickly to the Samaritan who succored him, "and every time since I 've been on this six weeks' jamboree might have kalkilated it would come to this. Snakes I 've seen afore now, and rats I 'm not unfamiliar with, but when it comes to the starn of a ship risin' up out of the street, I reckon it 's time to pass in my checks."

"It *is* a ship, you blasted old soaker," said the Samaritan curtly.

It was indeed a ship. A ship run ashore and abandoned on the beach years before by her gold-seeking crew, with the débris of her scattered stores and cargo, overtaken by the wild growth of the strange city and the reclamation of the muddy flat, wherein she lay hopelessly imbedded; her retreat cut off by wharves and quays and breakwater, jostled at first by sheds, and then impacted in a block of solid warehouses and dwellings, her rudder, port, and counter boarded in, and now gazing hopelessly through her cabin windows upon the busy street before her. But still a ship despite her transformation. The faintest line of contour yet left visible spoke of the buoyancy of another element; the balustrade of her roof was unmistakably a taffrail. The rain slipped from her swelling sides with a certain lingering touch of the sea; the soil around her was still treacherous with its suggestions, and even the wind whistled nautically over her chimney. If, in the fury of some southwesterly gale, she had one night slipped her strange moorings and left a shining track through the lower town to the distant sea, no one would have been surprised.

Least of all, perhaps, her present owner and possessor, Mr. Abner Nott. For by the irony of circumstances, Mr.

Nott was a Far Western farmer who had never seen a ship before, nor a larger stream of water than a tributary of the Missouri River. In a spirit, half of fascination, half of speculation, he had bought her at the time of her abandonment, and had since mortgaged his ranch at Petaluma with his live stock, to defray the expenses of filling in the land where she stood, and the improvements of the vicinity. He had transferred his household goods and his only daughter to her cabin, and had divided the space "between decks" and her hold into lodging-rooms, and lofts for the storage of goods. It could hardly be said that the investment had been profitable. His tenants vaguely recognized that his occupancy was a sentimental rather than a commercial speculation, and often generously lent themselves to the illusion by not paying their rent. Others treated their own tenancy as a joke, — a quaint recreation born of the childlike familiarity of frontier intercourse. A few had left; carelessly abandoning their unsalable goods to their landlord, with great cheerfulness and a sense of favor. Occasionally Mr. Abner Nott, in a practical relapse, raged against the derelicts, and talked of dispossessing them, or even dismantling his tenement, but he was easily placated by a compliment to the "dear old ship," or an effort made by some tenant to idealize his apartment. A photographer who had ingeniously utilized the forecastle for a gallery (accessible from the bows in the next street) paid no further tribute than a portrait of the pretty face of Rosey Nott. The superstitious reverence in which Abner Nott held his monstrous fancy was naturally enhanced by his purely bucolic exaggeration of its real functions and its native element. "This yer keel has sailed and sailed and sailed," he would explain, with some incongruity of illustration, "in a bee line, makin' tracks for days runnin'. I reckon more storms and blizzards hez tackled her than you ken shake a stick at. She 's stampeded whales afore now,

and sloshed round with pirates and freebooters in and outer the Spanish Main, and across lots from Marcelleys where she was rared. And yer she sits peaceful-like just ez if she 'd never been outer a pertater patch, and had n't ploughed the sea with fo'sails and studdin' sails and them things cavortin' round her masts."

Abner Nott's enthusiasm was shared by his daughter, but with more imagination, and an intelligence stimulated by the scant literature of her father's emigrant wagon and the few books found on the cabin shelves. But to her the strange shell she inhabited suggested more of the great world than the rude, chaotic civilization she saw from the cabin windows or met in the persons of her father's lodgers. Shut up for days in this quaint tenement, she had seen it change from the enchanted playground of her childish fancy to the theatre of her active maidenhood, but without losing her ideal romance in it. She had translated its history in her own way, read its quaint nautical hieroglyphics after her own fashion, and possessed herself of its secrets. She had in fancy made voyages in it to foreign lands, had heard the accents of a softer tongue on its decks, and on summer nights, from the roof of the quarter-deck, had seen mellower constellations take the place of the hard metallic glitter of the Californian skies. Sometimes, in her isolation, the long, cylindrical vault she inhabited seemed, like some vast seashell, to become musical with the murmurings of the distant sea. So completely had it taken the place of the usual instincts of feminine youth that she had forgotten she was pretty, or that her dresses were old in fashion and scant in quantity. After the first surprise of admiration her father's lodgers ceased to follow the abstracted nymph except with their eyes, — partly respecting her spiritual shyness, partly respecting the jealous supervision of the paternal Nott. She seldom penetrated the crowded centre of the growing city; her rare excursions

were confined to the old ranch at Petaluma, whence she brought flowers and plants, and even extemporized a hanging-garden on the quarter-deck.

It was still raining, and the wind, which had increased to a gale, was dashing the drops against the slanting cabin windows with a sound like spray when Mr. Abner Nott sat before a table seriously engaged with his accounts. For it was "steamer night," — as that momentous day of reckoning before the sailing of the regular mail steamer was briefly known to commercial San Francisco, — and Mr. Nott was subject at such times to severely practical relapses. A swinging light seemed to bring into greater relief that peculiar encased casket-like security of the low-timbered, tightly fitting apartment, with its toy-like utilities of space, and made the pretty oval face of Rosey Nott appear a characteristic ornament. The sliding door of the cabin communicated with the main deck, now roofed in and partitioned off so as to form a small passage that led to the open starboard gangway, where a narrow, inclosed staircase built on the ship's side took the place of the ship's ladder under her counter, and opened in the street.

A dash of rain against the window caused Rosey to lift her eyes from her book.

"It 's much nicer here than at the ranch, father," she said coaxingly, "even leaving alone its being a beautiful ship instead of a shanty; the wind don't whistle through the cracks and blow out the candle when you 're reading, nor the rain spoil your things hung up against the wall. And you look more like a gentleman sitting in his own — ship — you know, looking over his bills and getting ready to give his orders."

Vague and general as Miss Rosey's compliment was, it had its full effect upon her father, who was at times dimly conscious of his hopeless rusticity and its incongruity with his surroundings. "Yes," he said awkwardly,

with a slight relaxation of his aggressive attitude; "yes, in course it 's more bang-up style, but it don't pay — Rosey — it don't pay. Yer 's the Pontiac that oughter be bringin' in, ez rents go, at least three hundred a month, don't make her taxes. I bin thinkin' seriously of sellin' her."

As Rosey knew her father had experienced this serious contemplation on the first of every month for the last two years, and cheerfully ignored it the next day, she only said, "I 'm sure the vacant rooms and lofts are all rented, father."

"That 's it," returned Mr. Nott thoughtfully, plucking at his bushy whiskers with his fingers and thumb as if he were removing dead and sapless incumbrances in their growth, "that 's just what it is — them 's ez in it themselves don't pay, and them ez haz left their goods — the goods don't pay. The feller ez stored them iron sugar kettles in the forehold, after trying to get me to make another advance on 'em, sez he believes he 'll have to sacrifice 'em to me after all, and only begs I 'd give him a chance of buying back the half of 'em ten years from now, at double what I advanced him. The chap that left them five hundred cases of hair-dye 'tween decks, and then skipped out to Sacramento, met me the other day in the street and advised me to use a bottle ez an advertisement, or try it on the starn of the Pontiac for fireproof paint. That foolishness ez all he 's good for. And yet thar might be suthin' in the paint, if a feller had nigger luck. Ther 's that New York chap ez bought up them damaged boxes of plug terbakker for fifty dollars a thousand, and sold 'em for foundations for that new building in Sansome Street at a thousand clear profit. It 's all luck, Rosey."

The girl's eyes had wandered again to the pages of her book. Perhaps she was already familiar with the text of her father's monologue. But recognizing an additional querulousness in his voice, she laid the book aside and patiently folded her hands in her lap.

"That 's right — for I 've suthin' to tell ye. The fact is Sleight wants to buy the Pontiac out and out just ez she stands with the two fifty vara lots she stands on."

"Sleight wants to buy her? Sleight?" echoed Rosey incredulously.

"You bet! Sleight — the big financier, the smartest man in 'Frisco."

"What does he want to buy her for?" asked Rosey, knitting her pretty brows.

The apparently simple question suddenly puzzled Mr. Nott. He glanced feebly at his daughter's face, and frowned in vacant irritation. "That 's so," he said, drawing a long breath; "there 's suthin' in that."

"What did he *say?*" continued the young girl impatiently.

"Not much. 'You 've got the Pontiac, Nott,' sez he. 'You bet!' sez I. 'What 'll you take for her and the lot she stands on?' sez he, short and sharp. Some fellers, Rosey," said Nott, with a cunning smile, "would hev blurted out a big figger and been cotched. That ain't my style. I just looked at him. 'I 'll wait fur your figgers until next steamer day,' sez he, and off he goes like a shot. He 's awfully sharp, Rosey."

"But if he is sharp, father, and he really wants to buy the ship," returned Rosey thoughtfully, "it 's only because he knows it 's valuable property, and not because he likes it as we do. He can't take that value away even if we don't sell it to him, and all the while we have the comfort of the dear old Pontiac, don't you see?"

This exhaustive commercial reasoning was so sympathetic to Mr. Nott's instincts that he accepted it as conclusive. He, however, deemed it wise to still preserve his practical attitude. "But that don't make it pay by the month, Rosey. Suthin' must be done. I 'm thinking I 'll clean out that photographer."

"Not just after he 's taken such a pretty view of the cabin front of the Pontiac from the street, father! No! He 's going to give us a copy, and put the other in a shop window in Montgomery Street."

"That 's so," said Mr. Nott musingly; "it 's no slouch of an advertisement. 'The Pontiac,' the property of A. Nott, Esq., of St. Jo, Missouri. Send it on to your aunt Phœbe; sorter make the old folks open their eyes — oh? Well, seein' he 's been to some expense fittin' up an entrance from the other street, we 'll let him slide. But as to that d—d old Frenchman Ferrers, in the next loft, with his stuck-up airs and highfalutin' style, we must get quit of him; he 's regularly gouged me in that ere horsehair spekilation."

"How can you say that, father!" said Rosey, with a slight increase of color. "It was your own offer. You know those bales of curled horsehair were left behind by the late tenant to pay his rent. When Mr. De Ferrières rented the room afterwards, you told him you 'd throw them in in the place of repairs and furniture. It was your own offer."

"Yes, but I did n't reckon ther 'd ever be a big price per pound paid for the darned stuff for sofys and cushions and sich."

"How do you know *he* knew it, father?" responded Rosey.

"Then why did he look so silly at first, and then put on airs when I joked him about it, eh?"

"Perhaps he did n't understand your joking, father. He 's a foreigner, and shy and proud, and — not like the others. I don't think he knew what you meant then, any more than he believed he was making a bargain before. He may be poor, but I think he 's been — a — a — gentleman."

The young girl's animation penetrated even Mr. Nott's

slow comprehension. Her novel opposition, and even the prettiness it enhanced, gave him a dull premonition of pain. His small round eyes became abstracted, his mouth remained partly open, even his fresh color slightly paled.

"You seem to have been takin' stock of this yer man, Rosey," he said, with a faint attempt at archness; "if he warn't ez old ez a crow, for all his young feathers, I 'd think he was makin' up to you."

But the passing glow had faded from her young cheeks, and her eyes wandered again to her book. "He pays his rent regularly every steamer night," she said quietly, as if dismissing an exhausted subject, "and he 'll be here in a moment, I dare say." She took up her book, and leaning her head on her hand, once more became absorbed in its pages.

An uneasy silence followed. The rain beat against the windows, the ticking of a clock became audible, but still Mr. Nott sat with vacant eyes fixed on his daughter's face, and the constrained smile on his lips. He was conscious that he had never seen her look so pretty before, yet he could not tell why this was no longer an unalloyed satisfaction. Not but that he had always accepted the admiration of others for her as a matter of course, but for the first time he became conscious that she not only had an interest in others, but apparently a superior knowledge of them. How did she know these things about this man, and why had she only now accidentally spoken of them? *He* would have done so. All this passed so vaguely through his unreflective mind, that he was unable to retain any decided impression but the far-reaching one that his lodger had obtained some occult influence over her through the exhibition of his baleful skill in the horsehair speculation. "Them tricks is likely to take a young girl's fancy. I must look arter her," he said to himself softly.

A slow, regular step in the gangway interrupted his pater-

nal reflections. Hastily buttoning across his chest the pea-jacket which he usually wore at home as a single concession to his nautical surroundings, he drew himself up with something of the assumption of a shipmaster, despite certain bucolic suggestions of his boots and legs. The footsteps approached nearer, and a tall figure suddenly stood in the doorway.

It was a figure so extraordinary that even in the strange masquerade of that early civilization it was remarkable; a figure with whom father and daughter were already familiar without abatement of wonder — the figure of a rejuvenated old man, padded, powdered, dyed, and painted to the verge of caricature, but without a single suggestion of ludicrousness or humor. A face so artificial that it seemed almost a mask, but, like a mask, more pathetic than amusing. He was dressed in the extreme of fashion of a dozen years before; his pearl-gray trousers strapped tightly over his varnished boots, his voluminous satin cravat and high collar embraced his rouged cheeks and dyed whiskers, his closely buttoned frock coat clinging to a waist that seemed accented by stays.

He advanced two steps into the cabin with an upright precision of motion that might have hid the infirmities of age, and said deliberately with a foreign accent: —

"You-r-r ac-coumpt?"

In the actual presence of the apparition Mr. Nott's dignified resistance wavered. But glancing uneasily at his daughter and seeing her calm eyes fixed on the speaker without embarrassment, he folded his arms stiffly, and with a lofty simulation of examining the ceiling, said: —

"Ahem! Rosa! The gentleman's account."

It was an infelicitous action. For the stranger, who evidently had not noticed the presence of the young girl before, started, took a step quickly forward, bent stiffly but profoundly over the little hand that held the account,

raised it to his lips, and with "a thousand pardons, mademoiselle," laid a small canvas bag containing the rent before the disorganized Mr. Nott and stiffly vanished.

The night was a troubled one to the simple-minded proprietor of the good ship Pontiac. Unable to voice his uneasiness by further discussion, but feeling that his late discomposing interview with his lodger demanded some marked protest, he absented himself on the plea of business during the rest of the evening, happily to his daughter's utter obliviousness of the reason. Lights were burning brilliantly in counting-rooms and offices, the feverish life of the mercantile city was at its height. With a vague idea of entering into immediate negotiations with Mr. Sleight for the sale of the ship, as a direct way out of his present perplexity, he bent his steps towards the financier's office, but paused and turned back before reaching the door. He made his way to the wharf and gazed abstractedly at the lights reflected in the dark, tremulous, jelly-like water. But wherever he went he was accompanied by the absurd figure of his lodger — a figure he had hitherto laughed at or half pitied, but which now, to his bewildered comprehension, seemed to have a fateful significance. Here a new idea seized him, and he hurried back to the ship, slackening his pace only when he arrived at his own doorway. Here he paused a moment and slowly ascended the staircase. When he reached the passage he coughed slightly and paused again. Then he pushed open the door of the darkened cabin and called softly: —

"Rosey!"

"What is it, father?" said Rosey's voice from the little stateroom on the right — Rosey's own bower.

"Nothing!" said Mr. Nott, with an affectation of languid calmness; "I only wanted to know if you was comfortable. It 's an awful busy night in town."

"Yes, father."

"I reckon thar 's tons o' gold goin' to the States to-morrow."

"Yes, father."

"Pretty comfortable, eh?"

"Yes, father."

"Well, I 'll browse round a spell, and turn in myself soon."

"Yes, father."

Mr. Nott took down a hanging lantern, lighted it, and passed out into the gangway. Another lamp hung from the companion hatch to light the tenants to the lower deck, whence he descended. This deck was divided fore and aft by a partitioned passage, — the lofts or apartments being lighted from the ports, and one or two by a door cut through the ship's side communicating with an alley on either side. This was the case with the loft occupied by Mr. Nott's strange lodger, which, besides a door in the passage, had this independent communication with the alley. Nott had never known him to make use of the latter door; on the contrary, it was his regular habit to issue from his apartment at three o'clock every afternoon, dressed as he has been described, stride deliberately through the passage to the upper deck, and thence into the street, where his strange figure was a feature of the principal promenade for two or three hours, returning as regularly at eight o'clock to the ship and the seclusion of his loft. Mr. Nott paused before the door, under the pretense of throwing the light before him into the shadows of the forecastle: all was silent within. He was turning back when he was impressed by the regular recurrence of a peculiar rustling sound which he had at first referred to the rubbing of the wires of the swinging lantern against his clothing. He set down the light and listened; the sound was evidently on the other side of the partition; the sound of some prolonged, rustling, scraping movement, with regu-

lar intervals. Was it due to another of Mr. Nott's unprofitable tenants — the rats? No. A bright idea flashed upon Mr. Nott's troubled mind. It was De Ferrières snoring! He smiled grimly. "Wonder if Rosey 'd call him a gentleman if she heard that," he chuckled to himself as he slowly made his way back to the cabin and the small stateroom opposite to his daughter's. During the rest of the night he dreamed of being compelled to give Rosey in marriage to his lodger, who added insult to the outrage by snoring audibly through the marriage service.

Meantime, in her cradle-like nest in her nautical bower, Miss Rosey slumbered as lightly. Waking from a vivid dream of Venice — a child's Venice — seen from the swelling deck of the proudly riding Pontiac, she was so impressed as to rise and cross on tiptoe to the little slanting port-hole. Morning was already dawning over the flat, straggling city, but from every counting-house and magazine the votive tapers of the feverish worshipers of trade and mammon were still flaring fiercely.

II

The day following "steamer night" was usually stale and flat at San Francisco. The reaction from the feverish exaltation of the previous twenty-four hours was seen in the listless faces and lounging feet of promenaders, and was notable in the deserted offices and warehouses still redolent of last night's gas, and strewn with the dead ashes of last night's fires. There was a brief pause before the busy life which ran its course from "steamer day" to steamer day was once more taken up. In that interval a few anxious speculators and investors breathed freely, some critical situation was relieved, or some impending catastrophe momentarily averted. In particular, a singular stroke of good fortune that morning befell Mr. Nott. He not only secured a new tenant, but, as he sagaciously

believed, introduced into the Pontiac a counteracting influence to the subtle fascinations of De Ferrières.

The new tenant apparently possessed a combination of business shrewdness and brusque frankness that strongly impressed his landlord. "You see, Rosey," said Nott, complacently describing the interview to his daughter, "when I sorter intimated in a keerless kind o' way that sugar kettles and hair-dye was about played out ez securities, he just planked down the money for two months in advance. 'There,' sez he, 'that 's *your* security — now where 's *mine?*' 'I reckon I don't hitch on, pardner,' sez I; 'security what for?' ''Spose you sell the ship?' sez he, 'afore the two months is up. I 've heard that old Sleight wants to buy her.' 'Then you gets back your money,' sez I. 'And lose my room,' sez he; 'not much, old man. You sign a paper that whoever buys the ship inside o' two months hez to buy *me* ez a tenant with it; that 's on the square.' So I sign the paper. It was mighty cute in the young feller, was n't it?" he said, scanning his daughter's pretty puzzled face a little anxiously; "and don't you see, ez I ain't goin' to sell the Pontiac, it 's just about ez cute in me, eh? He 's a contractor somewhere around yer, and wants to be near his work. So he takes the room next to the Frenchman, that that ship captain quit for the mines, and succeeds naterally to his chest and things. He 's mighty peart looking, that young feller, Rosey — long black mustaches, all his own color, Rosey — and he 's a regular high-stepper, you bet. I reckon he 's not only been a gentleman, but ez *now*. Some o' them contractors are very high-toned!"

"I don't think we have any right to give him the captain's chest, father," said Rosey; "there may be some private things in it. There were some letters and photographs in the hair-dye man's trunk that you gave the photographer."

"That 's just it, Rosey," returned Abner Nott with sublime unconsciousness, "photographs and love-letters you can't sell for cash, and I don't mind givin' 'em away, if they kin make a feller creature happy."

"But, father, have we the *right* to give 'em away?"

"They 're collateral security, Rosey," said her father grimly. "Co-la-te-ral," he continued, emphasizing each syllable by tapping the fist of one hand in the open palm of the other. "Co-la-te-ral is the word the big business sharps yer about call 'em. You can't get round that." He paused a moment, and then, as a new idea seemed to be painfully borne in his round eyes, continued cautiously: "Was that the reason why you would n't touch any of them dresses from the trunks of that opery gal ez skedaddled for Sacramento? And yet them trunks I regularly bought at auction — Rosey — at auction, on spec — and they did n't realize the cost of drayage."

A slight color mounted to Rosey's face. "No," she said hastily, "not that." Hesitating a moment, she then drew softly to his side, and placing her arms around his neck, turned his broad foolish face towards her own. "Father," she began, "when mother died, would *you* have liked anybody to take her trunks and paw round her things and wear them?"

"When your mother died, just this side o' Sweetwater, Rosey," said Mr. Nott, with beaming unconsciousness, "she had n't any trunks. I reckon she had n't even an extra gown hanging up in the wagin, 'cept the petticoat ez she had wrapped around yer. It was about ez much ez we could do to skirmish round with Injins, alkali, and cold, and we sorter forgot to dress for dinner. She never thought, Rosey, that you and me would live to be inhabitin' a paliss of a real ship. Ef she had she would have died a proud woman."

He turned his small, loving, boar-like eyes upon her as

a preternaturally innocent and trusting companion of Ulysses might have regarded the transforming Circe. Rosey turned away with the faintest sigh. The habitual look of abstraction returned to her eyes as if she had once more taken refuge in her own ideal world. Unfortunately the change did not escape either the sensitive observation or the fatuous misconception of the sagacious parent. "Ye 'll be mountin' a few furbelows and fixin's, Rosey, I reckon, ez only natural. Mebbe ye 'll have to prink up a little now that we 've got a gentleman contractor in the ship. I 'll see what I kin pick up in Montgomery Street." And indeed he succeeded a few hours later in accomplishing with equal infelicity his generous design. When she returned from her household tasks she found on her berth a purple velvet bonnet of extraordinary make and a pair of white satin slippers. "They 'll do for a start-off, Rosey," he explained, "and I got 'em at my figgers."

"But I go out so seldom, father; and a bonnet" —

"That 's so," interrupted Mr. Nott complacently, "it might be jest ez well for a young gal like yer to appear ez if she *did* go out, or would go out if she wanted to. So you kin be wearin' that ar headstall kinder like this evening when the contractor 's here, ez if you 'd jest come in from a *pasear.*"

Miss Rosey did not, however, immediately avail herself of her father's purchase, but contented herself with the usual scarlet ribbon that like a snood confined her brown hair when she returned to her tasks. The space between the galley and the bulwarks had been her favorite resort in summer when not actually engaged in household work. It was now lightly roofed over with boards and tarpaulin against the winter rain, but still afforded her a veranda-like space before the galley door, where she could read or sew, looking over the bow of the Pontiac to the tossing bay or the farther range of the Contra Costa hills.

Hither Miss Rosey brought the purple prodigy, partly to please her father, partly with a view of subjecting it to violent radical changes. But after trying it on before the tiny mirror in the galley once or twice, her thoughts wandered away, and she fell into one of her habitual reveries seated on a little stool before the galley door.

She was aroused from it by the slight shaking and rattling of the doors of a small hatch on the deck not a dozen yards from where she sat. It had been evidently fastened from below during the wet weather; but as she gazed the fastenings were removed, the doors were suddenly lifted, and the head and shoulders of a young man emerged from the deck. Partly from her father's description, and partly from the impossibility of its being anybody else, she at once conceived it to be the new lodger. She had time to note that he was young and good looking, graver, perhaps, than became his sudden pantomimic appearance; but before she could observe him closely, he had turned, closed the hatch with a certain familiar dexterity, and walked slowly towards the bows. Even in her slight bewilderment she observed that his step upon the deck seemed different to her father's or the photographer's, and that he laid his hand on various objects with a half-caressing ease and habit. Presently he paused and turned back, and glancing at the galley door for the first time encountered her wondering eyes.

It seemed so evident that she had been a curious spectator of his abrupt entrance on deck that he was at first disconcerted and confused. But after a second glance at her he appeared to resume his composure, and advanced a little defiantly towards the galley.

"I suppose I frightened you, popping up the fore hatch just now?"

"The what?" asked Rosey.

"The fore hatch," he repeated impatiently, indicating it with a gesture.

"And that 's the fore hatch?" she said abstractedly. "You seem to know ships."

"Yes — a little," he said quietly. "I was below, and unfastened the hatch to come up the quickest way and take a look round. I 've just hired a room here," he added explanatorily.

"I thought so," said Rosey simply; "you 're the contractor?"

"The contractor! — oh yes! You seem to know it all."

"Father 's told me."

"Oh, he 's your father — Nott? Certainly. I see now," he continued, looking at her with a half-repressed smile. "Certainly Miss Nott, good-morning," he half added and walked towards the companionway. Something in the direction of his eyes as he turned away made Rosey lift her hands to her head. She had forgotten to remove her father's baleful gift.

She snatched it off and ran quickly to the companionway.

"Sir!" she called.

The young man turned halfway down the steps and looked up. There was a faint color in her cheeks, and her pretty brown hair was slightly disheveled from the hasty removal of the bonnet.

"Father 's very particular about strangers being on this deck," she said a little sharply.

"Oh — ah — I 'm sorry I intruded."

"I — I — thought I 'd tell you," said Rosey, frightened by her boldness into a feeble anticlimax.

"Thank you."

She came back slowly to the galley and picked up the unfortunate bonnet with a slight sense of remorse. Why should she feel angry with her poor father's unhappy offering? And what business had this strange young man to use the ship so familiarly? Yet she was vaguely conscious

that she and her father, with all their love and their domestic experience of it, lacked a certain instinctive ease in its possession that the half-indifferent stranger had shown on first treading its deck. She walked to the hatchway and examined it with a new interest. Succeeding in lifting the hatch, she gazed at the lower deck. As she already knew the ladder had long since been removed to make room for one of the partitions, the only way the stranger could have reached it was by leaping to one of the rings. To make sure of this, she let herself down holding on to the rings, and dropped a couple of feet to the deck below. She was in the narrow passage her father had penetrated the previous night. Before her was the door leading to De Ferrières' loft, always locked. It was silent within; it was the hour when the old Frenchman made his habitual promenade in the city. But the light from the newly opened hatch allowed her to see more of the mysterious recesses of the forward bulkhead than she had known before, and she was startled by observing another yawning hatchway at her feet, from which the closely fitting door had been lifted, and which the new lodger had evidently forgotten to close again. The young girl stooped down and peered cautiously into the black abyss. Nothing was to be seen, nothing heard but the distant gurgle and click of water in some remoter depth. She replaced the hatch and returned by way of the passage to the cabin.

When her father came home that night she briefly recounted the interview with the new lodger, and her discovery of his curiosity. She did this with a possible increase of her usual shyness and abstraction, and apparently more as a duty than a colloquial recreation. But it pleased Mr. Nott also to give it more than his usual misconception. "Looking round the ship, was he — eh, Rosey?" he said, with infinite archness. "In course, kinder sweepin' round the galley, and offerin' to fetch you wood and water,

eh?" Even when the young girl had picked up her book, with the usual faint smile of affectionate tolerance, and then drifted away in its pages, Mr. Nott chuckled audibly. "I reckon old Frenchy did n't come by when the young one was bedevlin' you there."

"What, father?" said Rosey, lifting her abstracted eyes to his face.

At the moment it seemed impossible that any human intelligence could have suspected deceit or duplicity in Rosey's clear gaze. But Mr. Nott's intelligence was superhuman. "I was sayin' that Mr. Ferrières did n't happen in while the young feller was there — eh?"

"No, father," answered Rosey, with an effort to follow him out of the pages of her book. "Why?"

But Mr. Nott did not reply. Later in the evening he awkwardly waylaid the new lodger before the cabin door as that gentleman would have passed on to his room.

"I 'm afraid," said the young man, glancing at Rosey, "that I intruded upon your daughter to-day. I was a little curious to see the old ship, and I did n't know what part of it was private."

"There ain't no private part to this yer ship — that ez 'cepting the rooms and lofts," said Mr. Nott authoritatively. Then subjecting the anxious look of his daughter to his usual faculty for misconception, he added: "Thar ain't no place whar you have n't as much right to go ez any other man; thar ain't any man, furriner or Amerykan, young or old, dyed or undyed, ez hev got any better rights. You hear me, young fellow. Mr. Renshaw— my darter. My darter — Mr. Renshaw. Rosey, give the gentleman a chair. She 's only jest come in from a promeynade, and hez jest taken off her bonnet," he added, with an arch look at Rosey and a hurried look around the cabin, as if he hoped to see the missing gift visible to the general eye. "So take a seat a minit, won't ye?"

But Mr. Renshaw, after an observant glance at the young girl's abstracted face, brusquely excused himself. "I 've got a letter to write," he said, with a half bow to Rosey. "Good-night."

He crossed the passage to the room that had been assigned to him, and closing the door gave way to some irritability of temper in his efforts to light the lamp and adjust his writing materials; for his excuse to Mr. Nott was more truthful than most polite pretexts. He had, indeed, a letter to write, and one that, being yet young in duplicity, the near presence of his host rendered difficult. For it ran as follows: —

DEAR SLEIGHT, — As I found I could n't get a chance to make any examination of the ship except as occasion offered, I just went in to rent lodgings in her from the God-forsaken old ass who owns her, and here I am a tenant for two months. I contracted for that time in case the old fool should sell out to some one else before. Except that she 's cut up a little between decks by the partitions for lofts that that Pike County idiot has put into her, she looks but little changed, and her *forehold*, as far as I can judge, is intact. It seems that Nott bought her just as she stands, with her cargo half out, but he was n't here when she broke cargo. If anybody else had bought her but this cursed Missourian, who has n't got the hayseed out of his hair, I might have found out something from him, and saved myself this kind of fooling, which is n't in my line. If I could get possession of a loft on the main deck, well forward, just over the forehold, I could satisfy myself in a few hours; but the loft is rented by that crazy Frenchman who parades Montgomery Street every afternoon, and though old Pike County wants to turn him out, I 'm afraid I can't get it for a week to come.

If anything should happen to me, just you waltz down

here and corral my things at once, for this old frontier pirate has a way of confiscating his lodgers' trunks.

Yours, DICK.

III

If Mr. Renshaw indulged in any further curiosity regarding the interior of the Pontiac, he did not make his active researches manifest to Rosey. Nor, in spite of her father's invitation, did he again approach the galley — a fact which gave her her first vague impression in his favor. He seemed also to avoid the various advances which Mr. Nott appeared impelled to make, whenever they met in the passage, but did so without seemingly avoiding *her*, and marked his half-contemptuous indifference to the elder Nott by an increase of respect to the young girl. She would have liked to ask him something about ships, and was sure his conversation would have been more interesting than that of old Captain Bower, to whose cabin he had succeeded, who had once told her a ship was the "devil's hencoop." She would have liked also to explain to him that she was not in the habit of wearing a purple bonnet. But her thoughts were presently engrossed by an experience which interrupted the even tenor of her young life.

She had been, as she afterwards remembered, impressed with a nervous restlessness one afternoon which made it impossible for her to perform her ordinary household duties, or even to indulge her favorite recreation of reading or castle-building. She wandered over the ship, and impelled by the same vague feeling of unrest, descended to the lower deck and the forward bulkhead, where she had discovered the open hatch. It had not been again disturbed, nor was there any trace of further exploration. A little ashamed, she knew not why, of revisiting the scene of Mr. Renshaw's researches, she was turning back when she noticed that the door which communicated with De

Ferrières' loft was partly open. The circumstance was so unusual that she stopped before it in surprise. There was no sound from within; it was the hour when its queer occupant was always absent; he must have forgotten to lock the door, or it had been unfastened by other hands. After a moment of hesitation she pushed it farther open and stepped into the room.

By the dim light of two port-holes she could see that the floor was strewn and piled with the contents of a broken bale of curled horsehair, of which a few untouched bales still remained against the wall. A heap of morocco skins, some already cut in the form of chair-cushion covers, and a few cushions unfinished and unstuffed, lay in the light of the ports, and gave the apartment the appearance of a cheap workshop. A rude instrument for combining the horsehair, awls, buttons, and thread, heaped on a small bench, showed that active work had been but recently interrupted. A cheap earthenware ewer and basin on the floor, and a pallet made of an open bale of horsehair, on which a ragged quilt and blanket were flung, indicated that the solitary worker dwelt and slept beside his work.

The truth flashed upon the young girl's active brain, quickened by seclusion and fed by solitary books. She read with keen eyes the miserable secret of her father's strange guest in the poverty-stricken walls, in the mute evidences of menial handicraft performed in loneliness and privation, in this piteous adaptation of an accident to save the conscious shame of premeditated toil. She knew now why he had stammeringly refused to receive her father's offer to buy back the goods he had given him; she knew now how hardly gained was the pittance that paid his rent and supported his childish vanity and grotesque pride. From a peg in the corner hung the familiar masquerade that hid his poverty — the pearl-gray trousers, the black frock coat, the tall shining hat — in hideous con-

trast to the penury of his surroundings. But if *they* were here, where was *he*, and in what new disguise had he escaped from his poverty? A vague uneasiness caused her to hesitate and return to the open door. She had nearly reached it when her eye fell on the pallet which it partly illuminated. A singular resemblance in the ragged heap made her draw closer. The faded quilt was a dressing-gown, and clutching its folds lay a white, wasted hand.

The emigrant childhood of Rose Nott had been more than once shadowed by scalping-knives, and she was acquainted with Death. She went fearlessly to the couch, and found that the dressing-gown was only an enwrapping of the emaciated and lifeless body of De Ferrières. She did not retreat or call for help, but examined him closely. He was unconscious, but not pulseless; he had evidently been strong enough to open the door for air or succor, but had afterwards fallen into a fit on the couch. She flew to her father's locker and the galley fire, returned and shut the door behind her, and by the skillful use of hot water and whiskey soon had the satisfaction of seeing a faint color take the place of the faded rouge in the ghastly cheeks. She was still chafing his hands when he slowly opened his eyes. With a start, he made a quick attempt to push aside her hand and rise. But she gently restrained him.

"Eh — what!" he stammered, throwing his face back from hers with an effort and trying to turn it to the wall.

"You have been ill," she said quietly. "Drink this."

With his face still turned away he lifted the cup to his chattering teeth. When he had drained it he threw a trembling glance round the room and at the door.

"There 's no one been here but myself," she said quickly. "I happened to see the door open as I passed. I did n't think it worth while to call any one."

The searching look he gave her turned into an expression of relief, which, to her infinite uneasiness, again feebly

lightened into one of antiquated gallantry. He drew the dressing-gown around him with an air.

"Ah! it is a goddess, mademoiselle, that has deigned to enter the cell where — where — I amuse myself. It is droll, is it not? I came here to make — what you call — the experiment of your father's fabric. I make myself — ha! ha! — like a workman. Ah, bah! the heat, the darkness, the plebeian motion make my head to go round. I stagger, I faint, I cry out, I fall. But what of that? The great God hears my cry and sends me an angel. *Voilà!*"

He attempted an easy gesture of gallantry, but overbalanced himself and fell sideways on the pallet with a gasp. Yet there was so much genuine feeling mixed with his grotesque affectation, so much piteous consciousness of the ineffectiveness of his falsehood, that the young girl, who had turned away, came back and laid her hand upon his arm.

"You must lie still and try to sleep," she said gently. "I will return again. Perhaps," she added, "there is some one I can send for?"

He shook his head violently. Then in his old manner added, "After mademoiselle — no one."

"I mean" — she hesitated; "have you no friends?"

"Friends, — ah! without doubt." He shrugged his shoulders. "But mademoiselle will comprehend" —

"You are better now," said Rosey quickly, "and no one need know anything if you don't wish it. Try to sleep. You need not lock the door when I go; I will see that no one comes in."

He flushed faintly and averted his eyes. "It is too droll, mademoiselle, is it not?"

"Of course it is," said Rosey, glancing round the miserable room.

"And mademoiselle is an angel."

He carried her hand to his lips humbly — his first purely unaffected action. She slipped through the door, and softly closed it behind her.

Reaching the upper deck she was relieved to find her father had not returned, and her absence had been unnoticed. For she had resolved to keep De Ferrières' secret to herself from the moment that she had unwittingly discovered it, and to do this and still be able to watch over him without her father's knowledge required some caution. She was conscious of his strange aversion to the unfortunate man without understanding the reason; but as she was in the habit of entertaining his caprices more from affectionate tolerance of his weakness than reverence of his judgment, she saw no disloyalty to him in withholding a confidence that might be disloyal to another. "It won't do father any good to know it," she said to herself, "and if it *did* it ought n't to," she added, with triumphant feminine logic. But the impression made upon her by the spectacle she had just witnessed was stronger than any other consideration. The revelation of De Ferrières' secret poverty seemed a chapter from a romance of her own weaving; for a moment it lifted the miserable hero out of the depths of his folly and selfishness. She forgot the weakness of the man in the strength of his dramatic surroundings. It partly satisfied a craving she had felt; it was not exactly the story of the ship, as she had dreamed it, but it was an episode in her experience of it that broke its monotony. That she should soon learn, perhaps from De Ferrières' own lips, the true reason of his strange seclusion, and that it involved more than appeared to her now, she never for a moment doubted.

At the end of an hour she again knocked softly at the door, carrying some light nourishment she had prepared for him. He was asleep, but she was astounded to find that in the interval he had managed to dress himself completely in his antiquated finery. It was a momentary shock to the illusion she had been fostering, but she forgot it in the pitiable contrast between his haggard face and his poma-

tumed hair and beard, the jauntiness of his attire, and the collapse of his invalid figure. When she had satisfied herself that his sleep was natural, she busied herself softly in arranging the miserable apartment. With a few feminine touches she removed the slovenliness of misery, and placed the loose material and ostentatious evidences of his work on one side. Finding that he still slept, and knowing the importance of this natural medication, she placed the refreshment she had brought by his side and noiselessly quitted the apartment. Hurrying through the gathering darkness between decks, she once or twice thought she heard footsteps, and paused, but, encountering no one, attributed the impression to her over-consciousness. Yet she thought it prudent to go to the galley first, where she lingered a few moments before returning to the cabin. On entering she was a little startled at observing a figure seated at her father's desk, but was relieved at finding it was Mr. Renshaw.

He rose and put aside the book he had idly picked up. "I am afraid I am an intentional intruder this time, Miss Nott. But I found no one here, and I was tempted to look into this ship-shape little snuggery. You see, the temptation got the better of me."

His voice and smile were so frank and pleasant, so free from his previous restraint, yet still respectful, so youthful yet manly, that Rosey was affected by them even in her preoccupation. Her eyes brightened and then dropped before his admiring glance. Had she known that the excitement of the last few hours had brought a wonderful charm into her pretty face, had aroused the slumbering life of her half-wakened beauty, she would have been more confused. As it was, she was only glad that the young man should turn out to be "nice." Perhaps he might tell her something about ships; perhaps if she had only known him longer she might, with De Ferrières' permission, have

shared her confidence with him, and enlisted his sympathy and assistance. She contented herself with showing this anticipatory gratitude in her face as she begged him, with the timidity of a maiden hostess, to resume his seat.

But Mr. Renshaw seemed to talk only to make her talk, and I am forced to admit that Rosey found this almost as pleasant. It was not long before he was in possession of her simple history from the day of her baby emigration to California to the transfer of her childish life to the old ship, and even of much of the romantic fancies she had woven into her existence there. Whatever ulterior purpose he had in view, he listened as attentively as if her artless chronicle was filled with practical information. Once, when she had paused for breath, he said gravely, "I must ask you to show me over this wonderful ship some day, that I may see it with your eyes."

"But I think you know it already better than I do," said Rosey, with a smile.

Mr. Renshaw's brow clouded slightly. "Ah," he said, with a touch of his former restraint; "and why?"

"Well," said Rosey timidly, "I thought you went round and touched things in a familiar way as if you had handled them before."

The young man raised his eyes to Rosey's and kept them there long enough to bring back his gentler expression. "Then, because I found you trying on a very queer bonnet the first day I saw you," he said mischievously, "I ought to believe you were in the habit of wearing one."

In the first flush of mutual admiration young people are apt to find a laugh quite as significant as a sigh for an expression of sympathetic communion, and this master-stroke of wit convulsed them both. In the midst of it Mr. Nott entered the cabin. But the complacency with which he viewed the evident perfect understanding of the pair was destined to suffer some abatement. Rosey, suddenly con-

scious that she was in some way participating in the ridicule of her father through his unhappy gift, became embarrassed. Mr. Renshaw's restraint returned with the presence of the old man. In vain, at first, Abner Nott strove with profound levity to indicate his arch comprehension of the situation, and in vain, later, becoming alarmed he endeavored, with cheerful gravity, to indicate his utter obliviousness of any but a business significance in their *tête-à-tête*.

"I ought n't to hev intruded, Rosey," he said, "when you and the gentleman were talkin' of contracts, mebbe; but don't mind me. I 'm on the fly anyhow, Rosey dear, hevin' to see a man round the corner."

But even the attitude of withdrawing did not prevent the exit of Renshaw to his apartment and of Rosey to the galley. Left alone in the cabin, Abner Nott felt in the knots and tangles of his beard for a reason. Glancing down at his prodigious boots, which, covered with mud and gravel, strongly emphasized his agricultural origin and gave him a general appearance of standing on his own broad acres, he was struck with an idea. "It 's them boots," he whispered to himself softly; "they somehow don't seem 'xactly to trump or follow suit in this yer cabin; they don't hitch into anythin' but jist slosh round loose, and so to speak play it alone. And them young critters nat'rally feels it and gets out o' the way." Acting upon this instinct with his usual precipitate caution, he at once proceeded to the nearest second-hand shop, and purchasing a pair of enormous carpet slippers, originally the property of a gouty sea-captain, reappeared with a strong suggestion of newly upholstering the cabin. The improvement, however, was fraught with a portentous circumstance. Mr. Nott's footsteps, which usually announced his approach all over the ship, became stealthy and inaudible.

Meantime Miss Rosey had taken advantage of the absence of her father to visit her patient. To avoid attract-

ing attention she did not take a light, but groped her way to the lower deck and rapped softly at the door. It was instantly opened by De Ferrières. He had apparently appreciated the few changes she had already made in the room, and had himself cleared away the pallet, from which he had risen to make two low seats against the wall. Two bits of candle placed on the floor illuminated the beams above, the dressing-gown was artistically draped over the solitary chair, and a pile of cushions formed another seat. With elaborate courtesy he handed Miss Rosey to the chair. He looked pale and weak, though the gravity of the attack had evidently passed. Yet he persisted in remaining standing. "If I sit," he explained with a gesture, "I shall again disgrace myself by sleeping in mademoiselle's presence. Yes! I shall sleep — I shall dream — and wake to find her gone!"

More embarrassed by his recovery than when he was lying helplessly before her, she said hesitatingly that she was glad he was better, and that she hoped he liked the broth.

"It was manna from heaven, mademoiselle. See, I have taken it all — every precious drop. What else could I have done for mademoiselle's kindness?"

He showed her the empty bowl. A swift conviction came upon her that the man had been suffering from want of food. The thought restored her self-possession even while it brought the tears to her eyes. "I wish you would let me speak to father — or some one," she said impulsively, and stopped.

A quick and half-insane gleam of terror and suspicion lit up his deep eyes. "For what, mademoiselle! For an accident — that is nothing — absolutely nothing, for I am strong and well now — see!" he said tremblingly. "Or for a whim — for a folly you may say, that they will misunderstand. No, mademoiselle is good, is wise. She will say to herself, 'I understand, my friend Monsieur de

Ferrières for the moment has a secret. He would seem poor, he would take the rôle of artisan, he would shut himself up in these walls — perhaps I may guess why, but it is his secret. I think of it no more.'" He caught her hand in his with a gesture that he would have made one of gallantry, but that in its tremulous intensity became a piteous supplication.

"I have said nothing, and will say nothing, if you wish it," said Rosey hastily; "but others may find out how you live here. This is not fit work for you. You seem to be a — a gentleman. You ought to be a lawyer, or a doctor, or in a bank," she continued timidly, with a vague enumeration of the prevailing degrees of local gentility."

He dropped her hand. "Ah! does not mademoiselle comprehend that it is *because* I am a gentleman that there is nothing between it and this? Look!" he continued almost fiercely. "What if I told you it is the lawyer, it is the doctor, it is the banker, that brings me, a gentleman, to this, eh? Ah, bah! What do I say? This is honest, what I do! But the lawyer, the banker, the doctor, what are they?" He shrugged his shoulders, and pacing the apartment with a furtive glance at the half-anxious, half-frightened girl, suddenly stopped, dragged a small portmanteau from behind the heap of bales, and opened it. "Look, mademoiselle," he said, tremulously lifting a handful of worn and soiled letters and papers. "Look — these are the tools of your banker, your lawyer, your doctor. With this the banker will make you poor, the lawyer will prove you a thief, the doctor will swear you are crazy, eh? What shall you call the work of a gentleman — this" — he dragged the pile of cushions forward — "or this?"

To the young girl's observant eyes some of the papers appeared to be of a legal or official character, and others like bills of lading, with which she was familiar. Their half-theatrical exhibition reminded her of some play she

had seen; they might be the clue to some story, or the mere worthless hoardings of some diseased fancy. Whatever they were, De Ferrières did not apparently care to explain further; indeed, the next moment his manner changed to his old absurd extravagance. "But this is stupid for mademoiselle to hear. What shall we speak of? Ah! what *should* we speak of in mademoiselle's presence?"

"But are not these papers valuable?" asked Rosey, partly to draw her host's thoughts back to their former channel.

"Perhaps."

He paused and regarded the young girl fixedly. "Does mademoiselle think so?"

"I don't know," said Rosey. "How should I?"

"Ah! if mademoiselle thought so — if mademoiselle would deign" — He stopped again and placed his hand upon his forehead. "It might be so!" he muttered.

"I must go now," said Rosey hurriedly, rising with an awkward sense of constraint. "Father will wonder where I am."

"I shall explain. I will accompany you, mademoiselle."

"No, no," said Rosey quickly; "he must not know I have been here!" She stopped. The honest blush flew to her cheek, and then returned again, because she had blushed.

De Ferrières gazed at her with an exalted look. Then drawing himself to his full height, he said, with an exaggerated and indescribable gesture, "Go, my child, go. Tell your father that you have been alone and unprotected in the abode of poverty and suffering, but — that it was in the presence of Armand de Ferrières."

He threw open the door with a bow that nearly swept the ground, but did not again offer to take her hand. At

once impressed and embarrassed at this crowning incongruity, her pretty lips trembled between a smile and a cry as she said, "Good-night," and slipped away into the darkness.

Erect and grotesque De Ferrières retained the same attitude until the sound of her footsteps was lost, when he slowly began to close the door. But a strong arm arrested it from without, and a large carpeted foot appeared at the bottom of the narrowing opening. The door yielded, and Mr. Abner Nott entered the room.

IV

With an exclamation and a hurried glance around him, De Ferrières threw himself before the intruder. But slowly lifting his large hand, and placing it on his lodger's breast, he quietly overbore the sick man's feeble resistance with an impact of power that seemed almost as moral as it was physical. He did not appear to take any notice of the room or its miserable surroundings; indeed, scarcely of the occupant. Still pushing him, with abstracted eyes and immobile face, to the chair that Rosey had just quitted, he made him sit down, and then took up his own position on the pile of cushions opposite. His usually underdone complexion was of watery blueness; but his dull, abstracted glance appeared to exercise a certain dumb, narcotic fascination on his lodger.

"I mout," said Nott slowly, "hev laid ye out here on sight, without enny warnin', or dropped ye in yer tracks in Montgomery Street, wherever there was room to work a six-shooter in comf'ably. Johnson, of Petaluny — him, ye know, ez hed a game eye — fetched Flynn comin' outer meetin' one Sunday, and it was only on account of his wife, and she a second-hand one, so to speak. There was Walker, of Contra Costa, plugged that young Sacramento chap, whose name I disremember, full o' holes jest

ez he was sayin' 'good-by' to his darter. I mout hev done all this if it had settled things to please me. For while you and Flynn and that Sacramento chap ez all about the same sort o' men, Rosey 's a different kind from their sort o' women."

"Mademoiselle is an angel!" said De Ferrières, suddenly rising, with an excess of extravagance. "A saint! Look! I cram the lie, ha! down his throat who challenges it."

"Ef by mam'selle ye mean my Rosey," said Nott, quietly laying his powerful hands on De Ferrières' shoulders, and slowly pinning him down again upon his chair, "ye 're about right, though she ain't mam'selle yet. Ez I was sayin', I might hev killed you off-hand ef I hed thought it would hev been a good thing for Rosey."

"For her? Ah, well! Look, I am ready," interrupted De Ferrières, again springing to his feet and throwing open his coat with both hands. "See! here at my heart — fire!"

"Ez I was sayin'," continued Nott, once more pressing the excited man down in his chair, "I might hev wiped ye out — and mebbe ye would n't hev keered — or *you* might hev wiped *me* out, and I mout hev said, 'Thank'e,' but I reckon this ain't a case for what 's comf'able for you and me. It 's what 's good for *Rosey*. And the thing to kalkilate is, what 's to be done."

His small round eyes for the first time rested on De Ferrières' face, and were quickly withdrawn. It was evident that this abstracted look, which had fascinated his lodger, was merely a resolute avoidance of De Ferrières' glance, and it became apparent later that this avoidance was due to a ludicrous appreciation of De Ferrières' attractions.

"And after we 've done *that* we must kalkilate what Rosey *is*, and what Rosey wants. P'r'aps, ye allow, *you* know what Rosey is? P'r'aps you 've seen her prance

round in velvet bonnets and white satin slippers, and sich. P'r'aps you 've seen her readin' tracks and v'yages, without waitin' to spell a word, or catch her breath. But that ain't the Rosey ez *I* knows. It 's a little child ez uster crawl in and out the tailboard of a Mizzouri wagon on the alkali-pizoned plains, where there was n't another bit of God's mercy on yearth to be seen for miles and miles. It 's a little gal as uster hunger and thirst ez quiet and mannerly ez she now eats and drinks in plenty; whose voice was ez steady with Injins yellin' round yer nest in the leaves on Sweetwater ez in her purty cabin up yonder. *That 's* the gal ez I knows! That 's the Rosey ez my ole woman puts into my arms one night arter we left Laramie when the fever was high, and sez, 'Abner,' sez she, 'the chariot is swingin' low for me to-night, but thar ain't room in it for her or you to git in or hitch on. Take her and rare her, so we kin all jine on the other shore,' sez she. And I 'd knowed the other shore was n't no Californy. And that night, p'r'aps, the chariot swung lower than ever before, and my ole woman stepped into it, and left me and Rosey to creep on in the old wagon alone. It 's them kind o' things," added Mr. Nott thoughtfully, "that seem to pint to my killin' you on sight ez the best thing to be done. And yet Rosey might n't like it."

He had slipped one of his feet out of his huge carpet slippers; and as he reached down to put it on again, he added calmly, "And ez to yer marrying *her* it ain't to be done."

The utterly bewildered expression which transfigured De Ferrières' face at this announcement was unobserved by Nott's averted eyes, nor did he perceive that his listener the next moment straightened his erect figure and adjusted his cravat.

"Ef Rosey," he continued, "hez read in v'yages and tracks in Eyetalian and French countries of such chaps ez

you and kalkilates you 're the right kind to tie to, mebbe it mout hev done if you 'd been livin' over thar in a paliss, but somehow it don't jibe in over here and agree with a ship — and that ship lying comf'able ashore in San Francisco. You don't seem to suit the climate, you see, and your general gait is likely to stampede the other cattle. Agin," said Nott, with an ostentation of looking at his companion, but really gazing on vacancy, "this fixed-up, antique style of yours goes better with them ivy-kivered ruins in Rome and Palmyry that Rosey 's mixed you up with, than it would yere. I ain't sayin'," he added, as De Ferrières was about to speak, — "I ain't sayin' ez that child ain't smitten with ye. It ain't no use to lie and say she don't prefer you to her old father, or young chaps of her own age and kind. I 've seed it afor now. I suspicioned it afor I seed her slip out o' this place to-night. Thar! keep your hair on, such ez it is!" he added, as De Ferrières attempted a quick deprecatory gesture. "I ain't askin' yer how often she comes here, nor what she sez to you nor you to her. I ain't asked her and I don't ask you. I 'll allow ez you 've settled all the preliminaries and bought her the ring and sich; I 'm only askin' you now, kalkilatin' you 've got all the keerds in your own hand, what you 'll take to step out and leave the board?"

The dazed look of De Ferrières might have forced itself even upon Nott's one-idea'd fatuity, had it not been a part of that gentleman's system delicately to look another way at that moment so as not to embarrass his adversary's calculation. "Pardon," stammered De Ferrières, "but I do not comprehend!" He raised his hand to his head. "I am not well — I am stupid. Ah, mon Dieu!"

"I ain't sayin'," added Nott more gently, "ez you don't feel bad. It 's nat'ral. But it ain't business. I 'm asking you," he continued, taking from his breast pocket a large wallet, "how much you 'll take in cash now,

and the rest next steamer day, to give up Rosey and leave the ship."

De Ferrières staggered to his feet despite Nott's restraining hand. "To leave mademoiselle and leave the ship?" he said huskily, "is it not?"

"In course. Yer can leave things yer just ez you found 'em when you came, you know," continued Nott, for the first time looking round the miserable apartment. "It 's a business job. I 'll take the bales back agin, and you kin reckon up what you 're out, countin' Rosey and loss o' time."

"He wishes me to go — he has said," repeated De Ferrières to himself thickly.

"Ef you mean *me* when you say *him*, and ez thar ain't any other man around, I reckon you do — 'yes!'"

"And he asks me — he — this man of the feet and the daughter — asks me — De Ferrières — what I will take," continued De Ferrières, buttoning his coat. "No! it is a dream!" He walked stiffly to the corner where his portmanteau lay, lifted it, and going to the outer door, a cut through the ship's side that communicated with the alley, unlocked it and flung it open to the night. A thick mist like the breath of the ocean flowed into the room.

"You ask me what I shall take to go," he said, as he stood on the threshold. "I shall take what *you* cannot give, monsieur, but what I would not keep if I stood here another moment. I take my honor, monsieur, and — I take my leave!"

For a moment his grotesque figure was outlined in the opening, and then disappeared as if he had dropped into an invisible ocean below. Stupefied and disconcerted at this complete success of his overtures, Abner Nott remained speechless, gazing at the vacant space until a cold influx of the mist recalled him. Then he rose and shuffled quickly to the door.

"Hi! Ferrers! Look yer — Say! Wot 's your hurry, pardner?"

But there was no response. The thick mist, which hid the surrounding objects, seemed to deaden all sound also. After a moment's pause he closed the door, but did not lock it, and retreating to the centre of the room remained blinking at the two candles and plucking some perplexing problem from his beard. Suddenly an idea seized him. Rosey! Where was she? Perhaps it had been a preconcerted plan, and she had fled with him. Putting out the lights he stumbled hurriedly through the passage to the gangway above. The cabin door was open; there was the sound of voices — Renshaw's and Rosey's. Mr. Nott felt relieved but not unembarrassed. He would have avoided his daughter's presence that evening. But even while making this resolution with characteristic infelicity he blundered into the room. Rosey looked up with a slight start; Renshaw's animated face was changed to its former expression of inward discontent.

"You came in so like a ghost, father," said Rosey, with a slight peevishness that was new to her. "And I thought you were in town. Don't go, Mr. Renshaw."

But Mr. Renshaw intimated that he had already trespassed upon Miss Nott's time, and that no doubt her father wanted to talk with her. To his surprise and annoyance, however, Mr. Nott insisted on accompanying him to his room, and without heeding Renshaw's cold "Good-night," entered and closed the door behind him.

"P'r'aps," said Mr. Nott, with a troubled air, "you disremember that when you first kem here you asked me if you could hev that 'ere loft that the Frenchman had downstairs."

"No, I don't remember it," said Renshaw almost rudely. "But," he added, after a pause, with the air of a man obliged to revive a stale and unpleasant memory, "if I did — what about it?"

"Nuthin', only that you kin hev it to-morrow, ez that 'ere Frenchman is movin' out," responded Nott. "I thought you was sorter keen about it when you first kem."

"Umph! we 'll talk about it to-morrow." Something in the look of wearied perplexity with which Mr. Nott was beginning to regard his own malapropos presence arrested the young man's attention. "What 's the reason you did n't sell this old ship long ago, take a decent house in the town, and bring up your daughter like a lady?" he asked, with a sudden blunt good humor. But even this implied blasphemy against the habitation he worshiped did not prevent Mr. Nott from his usual misconstruction of the question.

"I reckon, now, Rosey 's got high-flown ideas of livin' in a castle with ruins, eh?" he said cunningly.

"Have n't heard her say," returned Renshaw abruptly. "Good-night."

Firmly convinced that Rosey had been unable to conceal from Mr. Renshaw the influence of her dreams of a castellated future with De Ferrières, he regained the cabin. Satisfying himself that his daughter had retired, he sought his own couch. But not to sleep. The figure of De Ferrières, standing in the ship side and melting into the outer darkness, haunted him, and compelled him in dreams to rise and follow him through the alleys and byways of the crowded city. Again, it was a part of his morbid suspicion that he now invested the absent man with a potential significance and an unknown power. What deep-laid plans might he not form to possess himself of Rosey, of which he, Abner Nott, would be ignorant? Unchecked by the restraint of a father's roof, he would now give full license to his power. "Said he 'd take his honor with him," muttered Abner to himself in the dim watches of the night; "lookin' at that sayin' in its right light, it looks bad."

V

The elaborately untruthful account which Mr. Nott gave his daughter of De Ferrières' sudden departure was more fortunate than his usual equivocations. While it disappointed and slightly mortified her, it did not seem to her inconsistent with what she already knew of him. "Said his doctor had ordered him to quit town under an hour, owing to a comin' attack of hay-fever, and he had a friend from furrin parts waitin' him at the Springs, Rosey," explained Nott, hesitating between his desire to avoid his daughter's eyes and his wish to observe her countenance.

"Was he worse? — I mean did he look badly, father?" inquired Rosey thoughtfully.

"I reckon not exactly bad. Kinder looked as if he mout be worse soon ef he did n't hump hisself."

"Did you see him? — in his room?" asked Rosey anxiously. Upon the answer to this simple question depended the future confidential relations of father and daughter. If her father had himself detected the means by which his lodger existed, she felt that her own obligations to secrecy had been removed. But Mr. Nott's answer disposed of this vain hope. It was a response after his usual fashion to the question he *imagined* she artfully wished to ask, *i. e.*, if he had discovered their rendezvous of the previous night. This it was part of his peculiar delicacy to ignore. Yet his reply showed that he had been unconscious of the one miserable secret that he might have read easily.

"I was there an hour or so — him and me alone — discussin' trade. I reckon he 's got a good thing outer that curled horsehair, for I see he 's got in an invoice o' cushions. I 've stowed 'em all in the forrard bulkhead until he sends for 'em, ez Mr. Renshaw hez taken the loft."

But although Mr. Renshaw had taken the loft, he did not seem in haste to occupy it. He spent part of the morn-

ing in uneasily pacing his room, in occasional sallies into the street from which he purposelessly returned, and once or twice in distant and furtive contemplation of Rosey at work in the galley. This last observation was not unnoticed by the astute Nott, who at once conceiving that he was nourishing a secret and hopeless passion for Rosey, began to consider whether it was not his duty to warn the young man of her preoccupied affections. But Mr. Renshaw's final disappearance obliged him to withhold his confidence till morning.

This time Mr. Renshaw left the ship with the evident determination of some settled purpose. He walked rapidly until he reached the counting-house of Mr. Sleight, when he was at once shown into a private office. In a few moments Mr. Sleight, a brusque but passionless man, joined him.

"Well," said Sleight, closing the door carefully. "What news?"

"None," said Renshaw bluntly. "Look here, Sleight," he added, turning to him suddenly. "Let me out of this game. I don't like it."

"Does that mean you've found nothing?" asked Sleight sarcastically.

"It means that I haven't looked for anything, and that I don't intend to without the full knowledge of that d—d fool who owns the ship."

"You've changed your mind since you wrote that letter," said Sleight coolly, producing from a drawer the note already known to the reader. Renshaw mechanically extended his hand to take it. Mr. Sleight dropped the letter back into the drawer, which he quietly locked. The apparently simple act dyed Mr. Renshaw's cheek with color, but it vanished quickly, and with it any token of his previous embarrassment. He looked at Sleight with the convinced air of a resolute man who had at last taken

a disagreeable step, but was willing to stand by the consequences.

"I *have* changed my mind," he said coolly. "I found out that it was one thing to go down there as a skilled prospector might go to examine a mine that was to be valued according to his report of the indications, but that it was entirely another thing to go and play the spy in a poor devil's house in order to buy something he didn't know he was selling and would n't sell if he did."

"And something that the man *he* bought of did n't think of selling; something *he* himself never paid for, and never expected to buy," sneered Sleight.

"But something that *we* expect to buy from our knowledge of all this, and it is that which makes all the difference."

"But you knew all this before."

"I never saw it in this light before. I never thought of it until I was living there face to face with the old fool I was intending to overreach. I never was *sure* of it until this morning, when he actually turned out one of his lodgers that I might have the very room I required to play off our little game in comfortably. When he did that, I made up my mind to drop the whole thing, and I 'm here to do it."

"And let somebody else take the responsibility — with the percentage — unless you 've also felt it your duty to warn Nott too," said Sleight, with a sneer.

"You only dare say that to me, Sleight," said Renshaw quietly, "because you have in that drawer an equal evidence of my folly and my confidence; but if you are wise you will not presume too far on either. Let us see how we stand. Through the yarn of a drunken captain and a mutinous sailor you became aware of an unclaimed shipment of treasure concealed in an unknown ship that entered this harbor. You are enabled, through me, to corroborate

some facts and identify the ship. You proposed to me, as a speculation, to identify the treasure if possible before you purchased the ship. I accepted the offer without consideration; on consideration I now decline it, but without prejudice or loss to any one but myself. As to your insinuation I need not remind you that my presence here to-day refutes it. I would not require your permission to make a much better bargain with a good-natured fool like Nott than I could with you. Or if I did not care for the business I could have warned the girl" —

"The girl — what girl?"

Renshaw bit his lip, but answered boldly: "The old man's daughter — a poor girl — whom this act would rob as well as her father."

Sleight looked at his companion attentively. "You might have said so at first, and let up on this camp-meetin' exhortation. Well, then — admitting you 've got the old man and the young girl on the same string, and that you 've played it pretty low down in the short time you 've been there, — I suppose, Dick Renshaw, I 've got to see your bluff. Well, how much is it? What 's the figure you and she have settled on?"

For an instant Mr. Sleight was in physical danger. But before he had finished speaking Renshaw's quick sense of the ludicrous had so far overcome his first indignation as to enable him even to admire the perfect moral insensibility of his companion. As he rose and walked towards the door, he half wondered that he had ever treated the affair seriously. With a smile he replied: —

"Far from bluffing, Sleight, I am throwing my cards on the table. Consider that I 've passed out. Let some other man take my hand. Rake down the pot if you like, old man, *I* leave for Sacramento to-night. *Adios.*"

When the door had closed behind him Mr. Sleight summoned his clerk.

"Is that petition for grading Pontiac Street ready?"

"I've seen the largest property-holders, sir; they're only waiting for you to sign first." Mr. Sleight paused and then affixed his signature to the paper his clerk laid before him. "Get the other names and send it up at once."

"If Mr. Nott doesn't sign, sir?"

"No matter. He will be assessed all the same." Mr. Sleight took up his hat.

"The Lascar seaman that was here the other day has been wanting to see you, sir. I said you were busy."

Mr. Sleight put down his hat. "Send him up."

Nevertheless Mr. Sleight sat down and at once abstracted himself so completely as to be apparently in utter oblivion of the man who entered. He was lithe and Indian-looking; bearing in dress and manner the careless slouch without the easy frankness of a sailor.

"Well!" said Sleight, without looking up.

"I was only wantin' to know ef you had any news for me, boss?"

"News?" echoed Sleight, as if absently; "news of what?"

"That little matter of the Pontiac we talked about, boss," returned the Lascar, with an uneasy servility in the whites of his teeth and eyes.

"Oh," said Sleight, "that's played out. It's a regular fraud. It's an old forecastle yarn, my man, that you can't reel off in the cabin."

The sailor's face darkened.

"The man who was looking into it has thrown the whole thing up. I tell you it's played out!" repeated Sleight, without raising his head.

"It's true, boss — every word," said the Lascar, with an appealing insinuation that seemed to struggle hard with savage earnestness. "You can swear me, boss; I would n't lie to a gentleman like you. Your man has n't half looked, or else — it must be there, or" —

"That 's just it," said Sleight slowly; "who 's to know that your friends have n't been there already — that seems to have been your style."

"But no one knew it but me, until I told you, I swear to God. I ain't lying, boss, and I ain't drunk. Say — don't give it up, boss. That man of yours likely don't believe it, because he don't know anything about it. I *do* — *I* could find it."

A silence followed. Mr. Sleight remained completely absorbed in his papers for some moments. Then glancing at the Lascar, he took his pen, wrote a hurried note, folded it, addressed it, and holding it between his fingers, leaned back in his chair.

"If you choose to take this note to my man, he may give it another show. Mind, I don't say that he *will*. He 's going to Sacramento to-night, but you could go down there and find him before he starts. He 's got a room there, I believe. While you 're waiting for him, you might keep your eyes open to satisfy yourself."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the sailor, eagerly endeavoring to catch the eye of his employer. But Mr. Sleight looked straight before him, and he turned to go.

"The Sacramento boat goes at nine," said Mr. Sleight quietly.

This time their glances met, and the Lascar's eye glistened with subtle intelligence. The next moment he was gone, and Mr. Sleight again became absorbed in his papers.

Meanwhile Renshaw was making his way back to the Pontiac with that light-hearted optimism that had characterized his parting with Sleight. It was this quality of his nature, fostered perhaps by the easy civilization in which he moved, that had originally drawn him into relations with the man he had just quitted; a quality that had been troubled and darkened by those relations, yet, when they were broken, at once returned. It consequently did not

occur to him that he had only selfishly compromised with the difficulty; it seemed to him enough that he had withdrawn from a compact he thought dishonorable; he was not called upon to betray his partner in that compact merely to benefit others. He had been willing to incur suspicion and loss to reinstate himself in his self-respect, more he could not do without justifying that suspicion. The view taken by Sleight was, after all, that which most business men would take — which even the unbusinesslike Nott would take — which the girl herself might be tempted to listen to. Clearly he could do nothing but abandon the Pontiac and her owner to the fate he could not in honor avert. And even that fate was problematical. It did not follow that the treasure was still concealed in the Pontiac, nor that Nott would be willing to sell her. He would make some excuse to Nott — he smiled to think he would probably be classed in the long line of absconding tenants — he would say good-by to Rosey, and leave for Sacramento that night. He ascended the stairs to the gangway with a freer breast than when he first entered the ship.

Mr. Nott was evidently absent; and after a quick glance at the half-open cabin door, Renshaw turned towards the galley. But Miss Rosey was not in her accustomed haunt, and with a feeling of disappointment, which seemed inconsistent with so slight a cause, he crossed the deck impatiently and entered his room. He was about to close the door when the prolonged rustle of a trailing skirt in the passage attracted his attention. The sound was so unlike that made by any garment worn by Rosey that he remained motionless, with his hand on the door. The sound approached nearer, and the next moment a white veiled figure with a trailing skirt slowly swept past the room. Renshaw's pulses halted for an instant in half-superstitious awe. As the apparition glided on and vanished in the cabin door he could only see that it was the

form of a beautiful and graceful woman — but nothing more. Bewildered and curious, he forgot himself so far as to follow it and impulsively entered the cabin. The figure turned, uttered a little cry, threw the veil aside, and showed the half-troubled, half-blushing face of Rosey.

"I — beg — your pardon," stammered Renshaw; "I did n't know it was you."

"I was trying on some things," said Rosey, recovering her composure and pointing to an open trunk that seemed to contain a theatrical wardrobe — "some things father gave me long ago. I wanted to see if there was anything I could use. I thought I was all alone in the ship, but fancying I heard a noise forward, I came out to see what it was. I suppose it must have been you."

She raised her clear eyes to his, with a slight touch of womanly reserve that was so incompatible with any vulgar vanity or girlish coquetry that he became the more embarrassed. Her dress, too, of a slightly antique shape, rich but simple, seemed to reveal and accent a certain repose of gentle womanliness, that he was now wishing to believe he had always noticed. Conscious of a superiority in her that now seemed to change their relations completely, he alone remained silent, awkward, and embarrassed before the girl who had taken care of his room, and who cooked in the galley! What he had thoughtlessly considered a merely vulgar business intrigue against her stupid father, now to his extravagant fancy assumed the proportions of a sacrilege to herself.

"You 've had your revenge, Miss Nott, for the fright I once gave you," he said a little uneasily, "for you quite startled me just now as you passed. I began to think the Pontiac was haunted. I thought you were a ghost. I don't know why such a ghost should *frighten* anybody," he went on with a desperate attempt to recover his position by gallantry. "Let me see — that 's Donna Elvira's dress — is it not?"

"I don't think that was the poor woman's name," said Rosey simply; "she died of yellow fever at New Orleans as Signora Somebody."

Her ignorance seemed to Mr. Renshaw so plainly to partake more of the nun than the provincial, that he hesitated to explain to her that he meant the heroine of an opera.

"It seems dreadful to put on the poor thing's clothes, does n't it?" she added.

Mr. Renshaw's eyes showed so plainly that he thought otherwise, that she drew a little austerely towards the door of her stateroom.

"I must change these things before any one comes," she said dryly.

"That means I must go, I suppose. But could n't you let me wait here or in the gangway until then, Miss Nott? I am going away to-night, and I may n't see you again." He had not intended to say this, but it slipped from his embarrassed tongue. She stopped with her hand on the door.

"You are going away?"

"I — think — I must leave to-night. I have some important business in Sacramento."

She raised her frank eyes to his. The unmistakable look of disappointment that he saw in them gave his heart a sudden throb and sent the quick blood to his cheeks.

"It 's too bad," she said abstractedly. "Nobody ever seems to stay here long. Captain Bower promised to tell me all about the ship, and he went away the second week. The photographer left before he finished the picture of the Pontiac; Monsieur de Ferrières has only just gone; and now *you* are going."

"Perhaps, unlike them, I have finished my season of usefulness here," he replied, with a bitterness he would have recalled the next moment. But Rosey, with a faint

sigh, saying, "I won't be long," entered the stateroom and closed the door behind her.

Renshaw pulled at the long silken threads of his mustache and bit his lip until it smarted. Why had he not gone at once? Why was it necessary to say he might not see her again — and if he had said it, why should he add anything more? What was he waiting for now? To endeavor to prove to her that he really bore no resemblance to Captain Bower, the photographer, the crazy Frenchman De Ferrières? Or would he be forced to tell her that he was running away from a conspiracy to defraud her father — merely for something to say? Was there ever such folly? Rosey was "not long," as she had said, but he was beginning to pace the narrow cabin impatiently when the door opened and she returned.

She had resumed her ordinary calico gown, but such was the impression left upon Renshaw's fancy that she seemed to wear it with a new grace. At any other time he might have recognized the change as due to a new corset, which strict veracity compels me to record Rosey had adopted for the first time that morning. Howbeit, her slight coquetry seemed to have passed, for she closed the open trunk with a return of her old listless air, and sitting on it rested her elbows on her knees and her oval chin in her hands.

"I wish you would do me a favor," she said, after a reflective pause.

"Let me know what it is and it shall be done," replied Renshaw quickly.

"If you should come across Monsieur de Ferrières, or hear of him, I wish you would let me know. He was very poorly when he left here, and I should like to know if he is better. He did n't say where he was going. At least, he did n't tell father; but I fancy he and father don't agree."

"I shall be very glad of having even *that* opportunity

of making you remember me, Miss Nott," returned Renshaw, with a faint smile. "I don't suppose either that it would be very difficult to get news of your friend — everybody seems to know him."

"But not as I did," said Rosey, with an abstracted little sigh.

Mr. Renshaw opened his brown eyes upon her. Was he mistaken? Was this romantic girl only a little coquette playing her provincial airs on him? "You say he and your father did n't agree? That means, I suppose, that *you* and he agreed? — and that was the result."

"I don't think father knew anything about it," said Rosey simply.

Mr. Renshaw rose. And this was what he had been waiting to hear! "Perhaps," he said grimly, "you would also like news of the photographer and Captain Bower, or did your father agree with them better?"

"No," said Rosey quietly. She remained silent for a moment, and, lifting her lashes, said, "Father always seemed to agree with *you*, and that" — she hesitated.

"That 's why *you* don't."

"I did n't say that," said Rosey, with an incongruous increase of coldness and color. "I only meant to say it was that which makes it seem so hard you should go now."

Notwithstanding his previous determination Renshaw found himself sitting down again. Confused and pleased, wishing he had said more — or less — he said nothing, and Rosey was forced to continue.

"It 's strange, is n't it — but father was urging me this morning to make a visit to some friends at the old Ranch. I did n't want to go. I like it much better here."

"But you cannot bury yourself here forever, Miss Nott," said Renshaw, with a sudden burst of honest enthusiasm "Sooner or later you will be forced to go where you wi be properly appreciated, where you will be admired a

courted, where your slightest wish will be law. Believe me, without flattery, you don't know your own power."

"It does n't seem strong enough to keep even the little I like here," said Rosey, with a slight glistening of the eyes. "But," she added hastily, "you don't know how much the dear old ship is to me. It 's the only home I think I ever had."

"But the Ranch?" said Renshaw.

"The Ranch seemed to be only the old wagon halted in the road. It was a very little improvement on outdoors," said Rosey, with a little shiver. "But this is so cosy and snug, and yet so strange and foreign. Do you know I think I began to understand why I like it so since you taught me so much about ships and voyages. Before that I only learned from books. Books deceive you, I think, more than people do. Don't you think so?"

She evidently did not notice the quick flush that covered his cheeks and apparently dazzled his troubled eyelids, for she went on confidentially: —

"I was thinking of you yesterday. I was sitting by the galley door, looking forward. You remember the first day I saw you when you startled me by coming up out of the hatch?"

"I wish you would n't think of that," said Renshaw, with more earnestness than he would have made apparent.

"*I* don't want to, either," said Rosey gravely, "for I 've had a strange fancy about it. I saw once, when I was younger, a picture in a print shop in Montgomery Street that haunted me. I think it was called 'The Pirate.' There were a number of wicked-looking sailors lying around the deck, and coming out of the hatch was one figure, with his hands on the deck and a cutlass in his mouth."

"Thank you," said Renshaw.

"You don't understand. He was horrid-looking, not at all like you. I never thought of *him* when I first saw

you; but the other day I thought how dreadful it would have been if some one like him and not like you had come up then. That made me nervous sometimes of being alone. I think father is too. He often goes about stealthily at night, as if he was watching for something."

Renshaw's face grew suddenly dark. Could it be possible that Sleight had always suspected him, and set spies to watch — or was he guilty of some double intrigue?

"He thinks," continued Rosey, with a faint smile, "that some one is looking round the ship, and talks of setting bear-traps. I hope you 're not mad, Mr. Renshaw," she added, suddenly catching sight of his changed expression, "at my foolishness in saying you reminded me of the pirate. I meant nothing."

"I know you 're incapable of meaning anything but good to anybody, Miss Nott, perhaps to me more than I deserve," said Renshaw, with a sudden burst of feeling. "I wish — I wish — you would do *me* a favor. *You* asked me one just now." He had taken her hand. It seemed so like a mere illustration of his earnestness, that she did not withdraw it. "Your father tells you everything. If he has any offer to dispose of the ship, will you write to me at once before anything is concluded?" He winced a little — the sentence of Sleight, "What 's the figure you and she have settled on?" flashed across his mind. He scarcely noticed that Rosey had withdrawn her hand coldly.

"Perhaps you had better speak to father, as it is *his* business. Besides, I shall not be here. I shall be at the Ranch."

"But you said you did n't want to go."

"I 've changed my mind," said Rosey listlessly. "I shall go to-night."

She rose as if to indicate that the interview was ended. With an overpowering instinct that his whole future happi-

ness depended upon his next act, he made a step towards her, with eager, outstretched hands. But she slightly lifted her own with a warning gesture. "I hear father coming — you will have a chance to talk *business* with him," she said, and vanished into her stateroom.

VI

The heavy tread of Abner Nott echoed in the passage. Confused and embarrassed, Renshaw remained standing at the door that had closed upon Rosey as her father entered the cabin. Providence, which always fostered Mr. Nott's characteristic misconceptions, left that perspicacious parent but one interpretation of the situation. Rosey had evidently just informed Mr. Renshaw that she loved another!

"I was just saying good-by to Miss Nott," said Renshaw, hastily regaining his composure with an effort. "I am going to Sacramento to-night, and will not return. I" —

"In course, in course," interrupted Nott soothingly; "that 's wot you say now, and that 's wot you allow to do. That 's wot they allus do."

"I mean," said Renshaw, reddening at what he conceived to be an allusion to the absconding propensities of Nott's previous tenants, — "I mean that you shall keep the advance to cover any loss you might suffer through my giving up the rooms."

"Certingly," said Nott, laying his hand with a large sympathy on Renshaw's shoulder; "but we 'll drop that just now. We won't swap hosses in the middle of the river. We 'll square up accounts in your room," he added, raising his voice that Rosey might overhear him, after a preliminary wink at the young man. "Yes, sir, we 'll just square up and settle in there. Come along, Mr. Renshaw." Pushing him with paternal gentleness from the cabin, with his hand still upon his shoulder, he followed

him into the passage. Half annoyed at his familiarity, yet not altogether displeased by this illustration of Rosey's belief of his preference, Renshaw wonderingly accompanied him. Nott closed the door, and pushing the young man into a chair, deliberately seated himself at the table opposite. "It 's jist as well that Rosey reckons that you and me is settlin' our accounts," he began cunningly, "and mebbe it 's just ez well ez she should reckon you 're goin' away."

"But I *am* going," interrupted Renshaw impatiently. "I leave to-night."

"Surely, surely," said Nott gently, "that 's wot you kalkilate to do; that 's just nat'ral in a young feller. That 's about what I reckon *I 'd* hev done to her mother if anythin' like this hed ever cropped up, which it did n't. Not but what Almiry Jane had young fellers enough round her, but, 'cept ole Judge Peter, ez was lamed in the War of 1812, there ain't no similarity ez I kin see," he added musingly.

"I am afraid I can't see any similarity either, Mr. Nott," said Renshaw, struggling between a dawning sense of some impending absurdity and his growing passion for Rosey. "For Heaven's sake, speak out if you 've got anything to say."

Mr. Nott leaned forward and placed his large hand on the young man's shoulder. "That 's it. That 's what I sed to myself when I seed how things were pintin'. 'Speak out,' sez I, 'Abner! Speak out if you 've got anything to say. You kin trust this yer Mr. Renshaw. He ain't the kind of man to creep into the bosom of a man's ship for pupposes of his own. He ain't a man that would hunt round until he discovered a poor man's treasure, and then try to rob' " —

"Stop!" said Renshaw, with a set face and darkening eyes. "*What* treasure? *what* man are you speaking of?"

"Why Rosey and Mr. Ferrers," returned Nott simply.

Renshaw sank into his seat again. But the expression of relief which here passed swiftly over his face gave way to one of uneasy interest as Nott went on.

"P'r'aps it 's a little highfalutin' talkin' of Rosey ez a treasure. But considerin', Mr. Renshaw, ez she 's the only prop'ty I 've kept by me for seventeen years ez hez paid interest and increased in valoo, it ain't sayin' too much to call her so. And ez Ferrers knows this, he oughter been content with gougin' me in that horsehair spec, without goin' for Rosey. P'r'aps yer surprised at hearing me speak o' my own flesh and blood ez if I was talkin' hoss-trade, but you and me is bus'ness men, Mr. Renshaw, and we discusses ez such. We ain't goin' to slosh round and slop over in po'try and sentiment," continued Nott, with a tremulous voice, and a hand that slightly shook on Renshaw's shoulder. "We ain't goin' to git up and sing, 'Thou 'st larned to love another thou 'st broken every vow we 've parted from each other and my bosom 's lonely now oh is it well to sever such hearts as ourn forever kin I forget thee never farewell farewell farewell.' Ye never happened to hear Jim Baker sing that at the moosic hall on Dupont Street, Mr. Renshaw," continued Mr. Nott enthusiastically, when he had recovered from that complete absence of punctuation which alone suggested verse to his intellect. "He sorter struck water down here," indicating his heart, "every time."

"But what has Miss Nott to do with M. de Ferrières?" asked Renshaw, with a faint smile.

Mr. Nott regarded him with dumb, round, astonished eyes. "Hez n't she told yer?"

"Certainly not."

"And she did n't let on anythin' about him?" he continued feebly.

"She said she 'd like to know where" — He stopped, with the reflection that he was betraying her confidences.

[illegible] of some new form of deceit, to which [illegible] was a consenting party, almost [illegible] "Then she did n't tell yer that [illegible] was sparkin' and keepin' kimpany to-[illegible] was engaged, and was kalkilatin' [illegible] that she cottoned to him more [illegible] her father?"

"[illegible] did not, and I should n't believe it," said [illegible]

[illegible] He was amused: he astutely recognized [illegible] of love and youth. There was [illegible] Renshaw's attentive eyes saw the [illegible] darkened.

"[illegible] say that, Mr. Renshaw," said Nott, "[illegible] than Rosey deserves, ez it 's suthing on-[illegible] that 's come over her through Ferrers. [illegible] Rosey. But it 's Gospel truth, whether she's [illegible] whether it 's them damn fool stories [illegible] — and it 's like ez not he 's just the kind o' [illegible] hisself, and sorter advertise hisself, [illegible] — she 's allus stuck up for him. They 've [illegible] interviews, and when I taxed him with it [illegible] ez allowed it was so, and reckoned he must [illegible] ez he could run her off, you know — kinder [illegible] her with 'honor.' Them 's his very words."

"But that is all past: he is gone, and Miss Nott does not even know where he is!" said Renshaw, with a laugh, which, however, concealed a vague uneasiness.

Mr. Nott rose and opened the door carefully. When he had satisfied himself that no one was listening, he came back and said in a whisper, "That 's a lie. Not ez Rosey means to lie, but it 's a trick he 's put upon that poor child. That man, Mr. Renshaw, hez been hangin' round the Pontiac ever since. I 've seed him twice with own eyes pass the cabin windys. More than that,

I 've heard strange noises at night, and seen strange faces in the alley over yer. And only jist now ez I kem in I ketched sight of a furrin-lookin' Chinee nigger slinking round the back door of what useter be Ferrers' loft."

"Did he look like a sailor?" asked Renshaw quickly, with a return of his former suspicion.

"Not more than I do," said Nott, glancing complacently at his pea-jacket. "He had rings on his yeers like a wench."

Mr. Renshaw started. But seeing Nott's eyes fixed on him, he said lightly, "But what have these strange faces and this strange man — probably only a Lascar sailor out of a job — to do with Ferrières?"

"Friends o' his — feller furrin citizens — spies on Rosey, don't you see? But they can't play the old man, Mr. Renshaw. I 've told Rosey she must make a visit to the old Ranch. Once I 've got her thar safe, I reckon I kin manage Mr. Ferrers and any number of Chinee niggers he kin bring along."

Renshaw remained for a few moments lost in thought. Then rising suddenly, he grasped Mr. Nott's hand with a frank smile but determined eyes. "I have n't got the hang of this, Mr. Nott — the whole thing gets me! I only know that I 've changed my mind. I 'm *not* going to Sacramento. I shall stay *here*, old man, until I see you safe through the business, or my name 's not Dick Renshaw. There 's my hand on it! Don't say a word. Maybe it is no more than I ought to do — perhaps not half enough. Only remember, not a word of this to your daughter. She must believe that I leave to-night. And the sooner you get her out of this cursed ship the better."

"Deacon Flint's girls are goin' up in to-night's boat. I'll send Rosey with them," said Nott, with a cunning twinkle. Renshaw nodded. Nott seized his hand with a wink of unutterable significance.

Left to himself, Renshaw tried to review more calmly the circumstances in these strange revelations that had impelled him to change his resolution so suddenly. That the ship was under the surveillance of unknown parties, and that the description of them tallied with his own knowledge of a certain Lascar sailor who was one of Sleight's informants, seemed to be more than probable. That this seemed to point to Sleight's disloyalty to himself while he was acting as his agent, or a double treachery on the part of Sleight's informants, was in either case a reason and an excuse for his own interference. But the connection of the absurd Frenchman with the case, which at first seemed a characteristic imbecility of his landlord, bewildered him the more he thought of it. Rejecting any hypothesis of the girl's affection for the antiquated figure whose sanity was a question of public criticism, he was forced to the equally alarming theory that Ferrières was cognizant of the treasure, and that his attentions to Rosey were to gain possession of it by marrying her. Might she not be dazzled by a picture of this wealth? Was it not possible that she was already in part possession of the secret, and her strange attraction to the ship, and what he had deemed her innocent craving for information concerning it, a consequence? Why had he not thought of this before? Perhaps she had detected his purpose from the first, and had deliberately checkmated him. The thought did not increase his complacency as Nott softly returned: —

"It 's all right," he began, with a certain satisfaction in this rare opportunity for Machiavelian diplomacy, "it 's all fixed now. Rosey tumbled to it at once, partiklerly when I said you was bound to go. 'But wot makes Mr. Renshaw go, father,' sez she; 'wot makes everybody run away from the ship?' sez she, rather peart-like and sassy for her. 'Mr. Renshaw hez contractin' business,' sez I; 'got a big thing up in Sacramento that 'll make his for-

tun',' sez I — for I was n't goin' to give yer away, don't ye see? 'He had some business to talk to you about the ship,' sez she, lookin' at me under the corner of her pocket-handkerchief. 'Lots o' business,' sez I. 'Then I reckon he don't care to hev me write to him,' sez she. 'Not a bit,' sez I; 'he would n't answer ye if ye did. Ye 'll never hear from that chap agin.'"

"But what the devil" — interrupted the young man impetuously.

"Keep yer hair on!" remonstrated the old man with dark intelligence. "Ef you 'd seen the way she flounced into her stateroom! — she, Rosey, ez allus moves ez softly ez a spirit — you 'd hev wished I 'd hev unloaded a little more. No, sir, gals is gals in some things all the time."

Renshaw rose and paced the room rapidly. "Perhaps I 'd better speak to her again before she goes," he said impulsively.

"P'r'aps you 'd better not," replied the imperturbable Nott.

Irritated as he was, Renshaw could not avoid the reflection that the old man was right. What, indeed, could he say to her with his present imperfect knowledge? How could she write to him if that knowledge was correct?

"Ef," said Nott kindly, with a laying on of large benedictory and paternal hands, — "ef ye 're willin' to see Rosey agin, without *speakin'* to her, I reckon I ken fix it for yer. I 'm goin' to take her down to the boat in half an hour. Ef yer should happen — mind, ef yer should *happen* to be down there, seein' some friends off and sorter promenadin' up and down the wharf like them high-toned chaps on Montgomery Street — ye might ketch her eye unconscious like. Or, ye might do this!" He rose after a moment's cogitation and with a face of profound mystery opened the door and beckoned Renshaw to follow him. Leading the way cautiously, he brought the young man

into an open unpartitioned recess beside her stateroom. It seemed to be used as a storeroom, and Renshaw's eye was caught by a trunk the size and shape of the one that had provided Rosey with the materials of her masquerade. Pointing to it, Mr. Nott said in a grave whisper: "This yer trunk is the companion trunk to Rosey's. *She's* got the things them opery women wears; this yer contains the *he* things, the duds and fixin's o' the men o' the same stripe." Throwing it open, he continued: "Now, Mr. Renshaw, gals is gals; it 's nat'ral they should be took by fancy dress and store clothes on young chaps as on theirselves. That man Ferrers hez got the dead-wood on all of ye in this sort of thing, and hez been playing, so to speak, a lone hand all along. And ef thar 's anythin' in thar," he added, lifting part of a theatrical wardrobe, "that you think you 'd fancy — anythin' you 'd like to put on when ye promenade the wharf down yonder — it 's yours. Don't ye be bashful, but help yourself."

It was fully a minute before Renshaw fairly grasped the old man's meaning. But when he did — when the suggested spectacle of himself arrayed à la Ferrières, gravely promenading the wharf as a last gorgeous appeal to the affections of Rosey, rose before his fancy, he gave way to a fit of genuine laughter. The nervous tension of the past few hours relaxed; he laughed until the tears came into his eyes; he was still laughing when the door of the cabin suddenly opened and Rosey appeared cold and distant on the threshold.

"I — beg your pardon," stammered Renshaw hastily. "I did n't mean — to disturb you — I" —

Without looking at him Rosey turned to her father. "I am ready," she said coldly, and closed the door again.

A glance of artful intelligence came into Nott's eyes, which had remained blankly staring at Renshaw's apparently causeless hilarity. Turning to him he winked

solemnly. "That keerless kind o' hoss-laff jist fetched her," he whispered, and vanished before his chagrined companion could reply.

When Mr. Nott and his daughter departed, Renshaw was not in the ship, neither did he make a spectacular appearance on the wharf as Mr. Nott had fondly expected, nor did he turn up again until after nine o'clock, when he found the old man in the cabin awaiting his return with some agitation. "A minit ago," he said, mysteriously closing the door behind Renshaw, "I heard a voice in the passage, and goin' out, who should I see agin but that darned furrin nigger ez I told yer 'bout, kinder hidin' in the dark, his eyes shinin' like a catamount. I was jist reachin' for my weppins when he riz up with a grin and handed me this yer letter. I told him I reckoned you 'd gone to Sacramento, but he said he wez sure you was in your room, and to prove it I went thar. But when I kem back the d—d skunk had vamosed — got frightened, I reckon — and was n't nowhar to be seen."

Renshaw took the letter hastily. It contained only a line in Sleight's hand. "If you change your mind, the bearer may be of service to you."

He turned abruptly to Nott. "You say it was the same Lascar you saw before?"

"It was."

"Then all I can say is, he is no agent of De Ferrières'," said Renshaw, turning away with a disappointed air. Mr. Nott would have asked another question, but with an abrupt "Good-night" the young man entered his room, locked the door, and threw himself on his bed to reflect without interruption.

But if he was in no mood to stand Nott's fatuous conjectures, he was less inclined to be satisfied with his own. Had he been again carried away through his impulses evoked by the caprices of a pretty coquette and

the absurd theories of her half-imbecile father? Had he broken faith with Sleight and remained in the ship for nothing, and would not his change of resolution appear to be the result of Sleight's note? But why had the Lascar been haunting the ship before? In the midst of these conjectures he fell asleep.

VII

Between three and four in the morning the clouds broke over the Pontiac; and the moon, riding high, picked out in black and silver the long hulk that lay cradled between the iron shells and warehouses and the wooden frames and tenements on either side. The galley and covered gangway presented a mass of undefined shadow, against which the white deck shone brightly, stretching to the forecastle and bows, where the tiny glass roof of the photographer glistened like a gem in the Pontiac's crest. So peaceful and motionless she lay that she might have been some petrifaction of a past age now first exhumed and laid bare to the cold light of the stars.

Nevertheless, this calm security was presently invaded by a sense of stealthy life and motion. What had seemed a fixed shadow suddenly detached itself from the deck and began to slip stanchion by stanchion along the bulwarks toward the companionway. At the cabin door it halted and crouched motionless. Then rising, it glided forward with the same staccato movement until opposite the slight elevation of the fore hatch. Suddenly it darted to the hatch, unfastened and lifted it with a swift, familiar dexterity, and disappeared in the opening. But as the moon shone upon its vanishing face, it revealed the whitening eyes and teeth of the Lascar seaman.

Dropping to the lower deck lightly, he felt his way through the dark passage between the partitions, evidently less familiar to him, halting before each door to listen.

Returning forward he reached the second hatchway that had attracted Rosey's attention, and noiselessly unclosed its fastenings. A penetrating smell of bilge arose from the opening. Drawing a small bull's-eye lantern from his breast he lit it, and unhesitatingly let himself down to the further depth. The moving flash of his light revealed the recesses of the upper hold, the abyss of the well amidships, and glanced from the shining backs of moving zigzags of rats that seemed to outline the shadowy beams and transoms. Disregarding those curious spectators of his movements, he turned his attention eagerly to the inner casings of the hold, that seemed in one spot to have been strengthened by fresh timbers. Attacking this stealthily with the aid of some tools hidden in his oilskin clothing, in the light of the lantern he bore a fanciful resemblance to the predatory animals around him. The low, continuous sound of rasping and gnawing of timber which followed heightened the resemblance. At the end of a few minutes he had succeeded in removing enough of the outer planking to show that the entire filling of the casing between the stanchions was composed of small boxes. Dragging out one of them with feverish eagerness to the light, the Lascar forced it open. In the rays of the bull's-eye, a wedged mass of discolored coins showed with a lurid glow. The story of the Pontiac was true — the treasure was there!

But Mr. Sleight had overlooked the logical effect of this discovery on the natural villainy of his tool. In the very moment of his triumphant execution of his patron's suggestions the idea of keeping the treasure to himself flashed upon his mind. *He* had discovered it — why should he give it up to anybody? *He* had run all the risks; if he were detected at that moment, who would believe that his purpose there at midnight was only to satisfy some one else that the treasure was still intact? No. The circumstances were propitious; he would get the treasure out of

the ship at once, drop it over her side, hastily conceal it in the nearest lot adjacent, and take it away at his convenience. Who would be the wiser for it?

But it was necessary to reconnoitre first. He knew that the loft overhead was empty. He knew that it communicated with the alley, for he had tried the door that morning. He would convey the treasure there and drop it into the alley. The boxes were heavy. Each one would require a separate journey to the ship's side, but he would at least secure something if he were interrupted. He stripped the casing, and gathered the boxes together in a pile.

Ah, yes, it was funny too that he — the Lascar hound — the d—d nigger — should get what bigger and bullier men than he had died for! The mate's blood was on those boxes, if the salt water had not washed it out. It was a hell of a fight when they dragged the captain — Oh, what was that? Was it the splash of a rat in the bilge, or what?

A superstitious terror had begun to seize him at the thought of blood. The stifling hold seemed again filled with struggling figures he had known, the air thick with cries and blasphemies that he had forgotten. He rose to his feet, and running quickly to the hatchway, leaped to the deck above. All was quiet. The door leading to the empty loft yielded to his touch. He entered, and, gliding through, unbarred and opened the door that gave upon the alley. The cold air and moonlight flowed in silently; the way of escape was clear. Bah! He would go back for the treasure.

He had reached the passage when the door he had just opened was suddenly darkened. Turning rapidly, he was conscious of a gaunt figure, grotesque, silent, and erect, looming on the threshold between him and the sky. Hidden in the shadow, he made a stealthy step towards it, with an iron wrench in his uplifted hand. But the next

moment his eyes dilated with superstitious horror; the iron fell from his hand, and with a scream, like a frightened animal, he turned and fled into the passage. In the first access of his blind terror he tried to reach the deck above through the fore hatch, but was stopped by the sound of a heavy tread overhead. The immediate fear of detection now overcame his superstition; he would have even faced the apparition again to escape through the loft; but before he could return there, other footsteps approached rapidly from the end of the passage he would have to traverse. There was but one chance of escape left now — the forehold he had just quitted. He might hide there until the alarm was over. He glided back to the hatch, lifted it, and closed it softly over his head as the upper hatch was simultaneously raised, and the small round eyes of Abner Nott peered down upon it. The other footsteps proved to be Renshaw's, but attracted by the open door of the loft, he turned aside and entered. As soon as he disappeared Mr. Nott cautiously dropped through the opening to the deck below, and going to the other hatch through which the Lascar had vanished, deliberately refastened it. In a few moments Renshaw returned with a light, and found the old man sitting on the hatch.

"The loft door was open," said Renshaw. "There 's little doubt whoever was here escaped that way."

"Surely," said Nott. There was a peculiar look of Machiavelian sagacity in his face which irritated Renshaw.

"Then you 're sure it was Ferrières you saw pass by your window before you called me?" he asked.

Nott nodded his head with an expression of infinite profundity.

"But you say he was going *from* the ship. Then it could not have been he who made the noise we heard down here."

"Mebbe no, and mebbe yes," returned Nott cautiously.

"But if he was already concealed inside the ship, as that open door, which you say you barred from the inside, would indicate, what the devil did he want with this?" said Renshaw, producing the monkey-wrench he had picked up.

Mr. Nott examined the tool carefully, and shook his head with momentous significance. Nevertheless, his eyes wandered to the hatch on which he was seated.

"Did you find anything disturbed *there?*" said Renshaw, following the direction of his eye. "Was that hatch fastened as it is now?"

"It was," said Nott calmly. "But ye would n't mind fetchin' me a hammer and some o' them big nails from the locker, would yer, while I hang round here just so ez to make sure against another attack."

Renshaw complied with his request; but as Nott proceeded to gravely nail down the fastenings of the hatch, he turned impatiently away to complete his examination of the ship. The doors of the other lofts and their fastenings appeared secure and undisturbed. Yet it was undeniable that a felonious entrance had been made, but by whom or for what purpose still remained uncertain. Even now Renshaw found it difficult to accept Nott's theory that De Ferrières was the aggressor and Rosey the object, nor could he justify his own suspicion that the Lascar had obtained a surreptitious entrance under Sleight's directions. With a feeling that if Rosey had been present he would have confessed all, and demanded from her an equal confidence, he began to hate his feeble, purposeless, and inefficient alliance with her father, who believed but dared not tax his daughter with complicity in this outrage. What could be done with a man whose only idea of action at such a moment was to nail up an undisturbed entrance in his invaded house! He was so preoccupied with these thoughts that when Nott rejoined him in the cabin he scarcely heeded

his presence, and was entirely oblivious of the furtive looks which the old man from time to time cast upon his face.

"I reckon ye would n't mind," broke in Nott suddenly, "ef I asked a favor of ye, Mr. Renshaw. Mebbe ye 'll allow it 's askin' too much in the matter of expense; mebbe ye 'll allow it 's askin' too much in the matter o' time. But *I* kalkilate to pay all the expense, and if you 'd let me know what yer vally yer time at I reckon I could stand that. What I 'd be askin' is this. Would ye mind takin' a letter from me to Rosey and bringin' back an answer?"

Renshaw stared speechlessly at this absurd realization of his wish of a moment before. "I don't think I understand you," he stammered.

"P'r'aps not," returned Nott, with great gravity. "But that 's not so much matter to you ez your time and expenses."

"I meant I should be glad to go if I can be of any service to you," said Renshaw hastily.

"You kin ketch the seven o'clock boat this morning, and you 'll reach San Rafael at ten" —

"But I thought Miss Rosey went to Petaluma," interrupted Renshaw quickly.

Nott regarded him with an expression of patronizing superiority. "That 's what we ladled out to the public gin'rally, and to Ferrers and his gang in partickler. We *said* Petalumey, but if you go to Madroño Cottage, San Rafael, you 'll find Rosey thar."

If Mr. Renshaw required anything more to convince him of the necessity of coming to some understanding with Rosey at once, it would have been this last evidence of her father's utterly dark and supremely inscrutable designs. He assented quickly, and Nott handed him a note.

"Ye 'll be partickler to give this inter her own hands, and wait for an answer," said Nott gravely.

Resisting the proposition to enter then and there into an elaborate calculation of the value of his time and the expenses of the trip, Renshaw found himself at seven o'clock on the San Rafael boat. Brief as was the journey, it gave him time to reflect upon his coming interview with Rosey. He had resolved to begin by confessing all; the attempt of last night had released him from any sense of duty to Sleight. Besides, he did not doubt that Nott's letter contained some reference to this affair only known to Nott's dark and tortuous intelligence.

VIII

Madroño Cottage lay at the entrance of a little cañada already green with the early winter rains, and nestled in a thicket of the harlequin painted trees that gave it a name. The young man was a little relieved to find that Rosey had gone to the post-office a mile away, and that he would probably overtake her or meet her returning — alone. The road — little more than a trail — wound along the crest of the hill looking across the cañada to the long, dark, heavily wooded flank of Mount Tamalpais that rose from the valley a dozen miles away. A cessation of the warm rain, a rift in the sky, and the rare spectacle of cloud scenery, combined with a certain sense of freedom, restored that light-hearted gayety that became him most. At a sudden turn of the road he caught sight of Rosey's figure coming towards him, and quickened his step with the impulsiveness of a boy. But she suddenly disappeared, and when he again saw her she was on the other side of the trail, apparently picking the leaves of a manzanita. She had already seen him.

Somehow the frankness of his greeting was checked. She looked up at him with cheeks that retained enough of their color to suggest why she had hesitated, and said, "*You* here, Mr. Renshaw? I thought you were in Sacramento."

"And I thought *you* were in Petaluma," he retorted gayly. "I have a letter from your father. The fact is, one of those gentlemen who have been haunting the ship actually made an entry last night. Who he was, and what he came for, nobody knows. Perhaps your father gives you his suspicions." He could not help looking at her narrowly as he handed her the note. Except that her pretty eyebrows were slightly raised in curiosity she seemed undisturbed as she opened the letter. Presently she raised her eyes to his.

"Is this all father gave you?"

"All."

"You 're sure you have n't dropped anything?"

"Nothing. I have given you all he gave me."

"And that is all it is." She exhibited the missive, a perfectly blank sheet of paper folded like a note!

Renshaw felt the angry blood glow in his cheeks. "This is unpardonable! I assure you, Miss Nott, there must be some mistake. He himself has probably forgotten the inclosure," he continued, yet with an inward conviction that the act was perfectly premeditated on the part of the old man.

The young girl held out her hand frankly. "Don't think any more of it, Mr. Renshaw. Father is forgetful at times. But tell me about last night."

In a few words Mr. Renshaw briefly but plainly related the details of the attempt upon the Pontiac, from the moment that he had been awakened by Nott, to his discovery of the unknown trespasser's flight by the open door to the loft. When he had finished, he hesitated, and then, taking Rosey's hand, said impulsively, "You will not be angry with me if I tell you all? Your father firmly believes that the attempt was made by the old Frenchman, De Ferrières, with a view of carrying you off."

A dozen reasons other than the one her father would

have attributed it to might have called the blood to her face. But only innocence could have brought the look of astonished indignation to her eyes as she answered quickly: —

"So *that* was what you were laughing at?"

"Not that, Miss Nott," said the young man eagerly; "though I wish to God I could accuse myself of nothing more disloyal. Do not speak, I beg," he added impatiently, as Rosey was about to reply. "I have no right to hear you; I have no right to even stand in your presence until I have confessed everything. I came to the Pontiac; I made your acquaintance, Miss Nott, through a fraud as wicked as anything your father charges to De Ferrières. I am not a contractor. I never was an honest lodger in the Pontiac. I was simply a spy."

"But you did n't mean to be — it was some mistake, was n't it?" said Rosey, quite white, but more from sympathy with the offender's emotion than horror at the offense.

"I am afraid I did mean it. But bear with me for a few moments longer and you shall know all. It 's a long story. Will you walk on, and — take my arm? You do not shrink from me, Miss Nott. Thank you. I scarcely deserve the kindness."

Indeed so little did Rosey shrink that he was conscious of a slight reassuring pressure on his arm as they moved forward, and for the moment I fear the young man felt like exaggerating his offense for the sake of proportionate sympathy. "Do you remember," he continued, "one evening when I told you some sea tales, you said you always thought there must be some story about the Pontiac? There *was* a story of the Pontiac, Miss Nott — a wicked story — a terrible story — which I might have told you, which I *ought* to have told you — which was the story that brought me there. You were right, too, in saying

that you thought I had known the Pontiac before I stepped first on her deck that day. I had."

He laid his disengaged hand across lightly on Rosey's, as if to assure himself that she was listening.

"I was at that time a sailor. I had been fool enough to run away from college, thinking it a fine romantic thing to ship before the mast for a voyage round the world. I was a little disappointed, perhaps, but I made the best of it, and in two years I was the second mate of a whaler lying in a little harbor of one of the uncivilized islands of the Pacific. While we were at anchor there a French trading-vessel put in, apparently for water. She had the dregs of a mixed crew of Lascars and Portuguese, who said they had lost the rest of their men by desertion, and that the captain and mate had been carried off by fever. There was something so queer in their story that our skipper took the law in his own hands, and put me on board of her with a salvage crew. But that night the French crew mutinied, cut the cables, and would have got to sea if we had not been armed and prepared, and managed to drive them below. When we had got them under hatches for a few hours they parleyed, and offered to go quietly ashore. As we were short of hands and unable to take them with us, and as we had no evidence against them, we let them go, took the ship to Callao, turned her over to the authorities, lodged a claim for salvage, and continued our voyage. When we returned we found the truth of the story was known. She had been a French trader from Marseilles, owned by her captain; her crew had mutinied in the Pacific, killed their officers and the only passenger — the owner of the cargo. They had made away with the cargo and a treasure of nearly half a million of Spanish gold for trading purposes which belonged to the passenger. In course of time the ship was sold for salvage and put into the South American trade until the breaking out of the Cali-

fornian gold excitement when she was sent with a cargo to San Francisco. That ship was the Pontiac, which your father bought."

A slight shudder ran through the girl's frame. "I wish — I wish you had n't told me," she said. "I shall never close my eyes again comfortably on board of her, I know."

"I would say that you had purified her of *all* stains of her past — but there may be one that remains. And *that* in most people's eyes would be no detraction. You look puzzled, Miss Nott — but I am coming to the explanation and the end of my story. A ship of war was sent to the island to punish the mutineers and pirates, for such they were, but they could not be found. A private expedition was sent to discover the treasure which they were supposed to have buried, but in vain. About two months ago Mr. Sleight told me one of his shipmasters had sent him a Lascar sailor who had to dispose of a valuable secret regarding the Pontiac for a percentage. That secret was that the treasure was never taken by the mutineers out of the Pontiac! They were about to land and bury it when we boarded them. They took advantage of their imprisonment under hatches *to bury it in the ship.* They hid it in the hold so securely and safely that it was never detected by us or the Callao authorities. I was then asked, as one who knew the vessel, to undertake a private examination of her, with a view of purchasing her from your father without awakening his suspicions. I assented. You have my confession now, Miss Nott. You know my crime. I am at your mercy."

Rosey's arm only tightened around his own. Her eyes sought his. "And you did n't find anything?" she said.

The question sounded so oddly like Sleight's that Renshaw returned a little stiffly: —

"I did n't look."

"Why?" asked Rosey simply.

"Because," stammered Renshaw, with an uneasy consciousness of having exaggerated his sentiment, "it did n't seem honorable; it did n't seem fair to you."

"Oh, you silly! you might have looked and told *me*."

"But," said Renshaw, "do you think that would have been fair to Sleight?"

"As fair to him as to us. For, don't you see, it would n't belong to any of us. It would belong to the friends or the family of the man who lost it."

"But there were no heirs," replied Renshaw. "That was proved by some impostor who pretended to be his brother, and libeled the Pontiac at Callao, but the courts decided he was a lunatic."

"Then it belongs to the poor pirates who risked their own lives for it, rather than to Sleight, who did nothing." She was silent for a moment, and then resumed with energy, "I believe he was at the bottom of that attack last night."

"I have thought so too," said Renshaw.

"Then I must go back at once," she continued impulsively. "Father must not be left alone."

"Nor must *you*," said Renshaw quickly. "Do let me return with you, and share with you and your father the trouble I have brought upon you. Do not," he added in a lower tone, "deprive me of the only chance of expiating my offense, of making myself worthy your forgiveness."

"I am sure," said Rosey, lowering her lids and half withdrawing her arm, — "I am sure I have nothing to forgive. You did not believe the treasure belonged to us any more than to anybody else, until you knew *me*" —

"That is true," said the young man, attempting to take her hand.

"I mean," said Rosey, blushing, and showing a distracting row of little teeth in one of her infrequent laughs,

"oh, you know what I mean." She withdrew her arm gently, and became interested in the selection of certain wayside bay leaves as they passed along. "All the same, I don't believe in this treasure," she said abruptly, as if to change the subject. "I don't believe it ever was hidden inside the Pontiac."

"That can be easily ascertained now," said Renshaw.

"But it 's a pity you did n't find it out while you were about it," said Rosey. "It would have saved so much talk and trouble."

"I have told you why I did n't search the ship," responded Renshaw, with a slight bitterness. "But it seems I could only avoid being a great rascal by becoming a great fool."

"You never intended to be a rascal," said Rosey earnestly, "and you could n't be a fool, except in heeding what a silly girl says. I only meant if you had taken me into your confidence it would have been better."

"Might I not say the same to you regarding your friend, the old Frenchman?" returned Renshaw. "What if I were to confess to you that I lately suspected him of knowing the secret, and of trying to gain your assistance?"

Instead of indignantly repudiating the suggestion to the young man's great discomfiture, Rosey only knit her pretty brows, and remained for some moments silent. Presently she asked timidly: —

"Do you think it wrong to tell another person's secret for their own good?"

"No," said Renshaw promptly.

"Then I 'll tell you Monsieur de Ferrières'! But only because I believe from what you have just said that he will turn out to have some right to the treasure."

Then with kindling eyes, and a voice eloquent with sympathy, Rosey told the story of her accidental discovery of De Ferrières' miserable existence in the loft. Clothing

it with the unconscious poetry of her fresh, young imagination, she lightly passed over his antique gallantry and grotesque weakness, exalting only his lonely sufferings and mysterious wrongs. Renshaw listened, lost between shame for his late suspicions and admiration for her thoughtful delicacy, until she began to speak of De Ferrières' strange allusions to the foreign papers in his portmanteau. "I think some were law papers, and I am almost certain I saw the word Callao printed on one of them."

"It may be so," said Renshaw thoughtfully. "The old Frenchman has always passed for a harmless, wandering eccentric. I hardly think public curiosity has ever even sought to know his name, much less his history. But had we not better first try to find if there *is* any property before we examine his claims to it?"

"As you please," said Rosey, with a slight pout; "but you will find it much easier to discover him than his treasure. It 's always easier to find the thing you 're not looking for."

"Until you want it," said Renshaw, with sudden gravity.

"How pretty it looks over there," said Rosey, turning her conscious eyes to the opposite mountain.

"Very."

They had reached the top of the hill, and in the near distance the chimney of Madroño Cottage was even now visible. At the expected sight they unconsciously stopped — unconsciously disappointed. Rosey broke the embarrassing silence.

"There 's another way home, but it 's a roundabout way," she said timidly.

"Let us take it," said Renshaw.

She hesitated. "The boat goes at four, and we must return to-night."

"The more reason why we should make the most of our

time now," said Renshaw, with a faint smile. "To-morrow all things may be changed; to-morrow you may find yourself an heiress, Miss Nott. To-morrow," he added, with a slight tremor in his voice, "I may have earned your forgiveness, only to say farewell to you forever. Let me keep this sunshine, this picture, this companionship with you long enough to say now what perhaps I must not say to-morrow."

They were silent for a moment, and then by a common instinct turned together into a narrow trail, scarce wide enough for two, that diverged from the straight practical path before them. It was indeed a roundabout way home, so roundabout, in fact, that as they wandered on it seemed even to double on its track, occasionally lingering long and becoming indistinct under the shadow of madroño and willow; at one time stopping blindly before a fallen tree in the hollow, where they had quite lost it, and had to sit down to recall it; a rough way, often requiring the mutual help of each other's hands and eyes to tread together in security; an uncertain way, not to be found without whispered consultation and concession, and yet a way eventually bringing them hand in hand, happy and hopeful, to the gate of Madroño Cottage. And if there was only just time for Rosey to prepare to take the boat, it was due to the deviousness of the way. If a stray curl was lying loose on Rosey's cheek, and a long hair had caught in Renshaw's button, it was owing to the roughness of the way; and if in the tones of their voices and in the glances of their eyes there was a maturer seriousness, it was due to the dim uncertainty of the path they had traveled, and would hereafter tread together.

IX

When Mr. Nott had satisfied himself of Renshaw's departure, he coolly bolted the door at the head of the com-

panionway, thus cutting off any communication with the lower deck. Taking a long rifle from the rack above his berth, he carefully examined the hammer and cap, and then cautiously let himself down through the fore hatch to the deck below. After a deliberate survey of the still intact fastenings of the hatch over the forehold, he proceeded quietly to unloose them again with the aid of the tools that still lay there. When the hatch was once more free he lifted it, and withdrawing a few feet from the opening, sat himself down, rifle in hand. A profound silence reigned throughout the lower deck.

"Ye kin rize up out o' that," said Nott gently.

There was a stealthy rustle below that seemed to approach the hatch, and then with a sudden bound the Lascar leaped on the deck. But at the same instant Nott covered him with his rifle. A slight shade of disappointment and surprise had crossed the old man's face, and clouded his small round eyes at the apparition of the Lascar, but his hand was none the less firm upon the trigger as the frightened prisoner sank on his knees, with his hands clasped in the attitude of supplication for mercy.

"Ef you 're thinkin' o' skippin' afore I 've done with yer," said Nott, with labored gentleness, "I oughter warn ye that it 's my style to drop Injins at two hundred yards, and this deck ain't anywhere more 'n fifty. It 's an uncomfortable style, a nasty style — but it 's *my* style. I thought I 'd tell yer, so yer could take it easy where you air. Where 's Ferrers?"

Even in the man's insane terror, his utter bewilderment at the question was evident. "Ferrers?" he gasped; "don't know him, I swear to God, boss."

"P'r'aps," said Nott, with infinite cunning, "yer don't know the man ez kem into the loft from the alley last night — p'r'aps yer did n't see an airy Frenchman with a dyed mustache, eh? I thought that would fetch ye!" he

continued, as the man started at the evidence that his vision of last night was a living man. "P'r'aps you and him did n't break into this ship last night, jist to run off with my darter Rosey? P'r'aps yer don't know Rosey, eh? P'r'aps yer don't know ez Ferrers wants to marry her, and hez been hangin' round yer ever since he left — eh?"

Scarcely believing the evidence of his senses that the old man whose treasure he had been trying to steal was utterly ignorant of his real offense, and yet uncertain of the penalty of the other crime of which he was accused, the Lascar writhed his body and stammered vaguely, "Mercy! Mercy!"

"Well," said Nott cautiously, "ez I reckon the hide of a dead Chinee nigger ain't any more vallyble than that of a dead Injin, I don't care ef I let up on yer — seein' the cussedness ain't yours. But ef I let yer off this once, you must take a message to Ferrers from me."

"Let me off this time, boss, and I swear to God I will," said the Lascar eagerly.

"Ye kin say to Ferrers — let me see" — deliberated Nott, leaning on his rifle with cautious reflection. "Ye kin say to Ferrers like this — sez you, 'Ferrers,' sez you, 'the old man sez that afore you went away you sez to him, sez you, "I take my honor with me," sez you' — have you got that?" interrupted Nott suddenly.

"Yes, boss."

"'I take my honor with me,' sez you," repeated Nott slowly. "'Now,' sez you — 'the old man sez, sez he — tell Ferrers, sez he, that his honor havin' run away agin, he sends it back to him, and ef he ever ketches it around after this, he 'll shoot it on sight.' Hev yer got that?"

"Yes," stammered the bewildered captive.

"Then git!"

The Lascar sprang to his feet with the agility of a panther, leaped through the hatch above him, and disappeared

over the bow of the ship with an unhesitating directness that showed that every avenue of escape had been already contemplated by him. Slipping lightly from the cutwater to the ground, he continued his flight, only stopping at the private office of Mr. Sleight.

When Mr. Renshaw and Rosey Nott arrived on board the Pontiac that evening, they were astonished to find the passage before the cabin completely occupied with trunks and boxes, and the bulk of their household goods apparently in the process of removal. Mr. Nott, who was superintending the work of two Chinamen, betrayed not only no surprise at the appearance of the young people, but not the remotest recognition of their own bewilderment at his occupation.

"Kalkilatin'," he remarked casually to his daughter, "you 'd rather look arter your fixin's, Rosey, I 've left 'em till the last. P'r'aps yer and Mr. Renshaw would n't mind sittin' down on that locker until I 've strapped this yer box."

"But what does it all mean, father?" said Rosey, taking the old man by the lapels of his pea-jacket, and slightly emphasizing her question. "What in the name of goodness are you doing?"

"Breakin' camp, Rosey dear, breakin' camp, jist ez we uster," replied Nott, with cheerful philosophy. "Kinder like ole times, ain't it? Lord, Rosey," he continued, stopping and following up the reminiscence, with the end of the rope in his hand as if it were a clue, "don't ye mind that day we started outer Livermore Pass, and seed the hull o' the Californy coast stretchin' yonder — eh? But don't ye be skeered, Rosey dear," he added quickly, as if in recognition of the alarm expressed in her face. "I ain't turning ye outer house and home; I 've jist hired that 'ere Madroño Cottage from the Peters ontil we kin look round."

"But you 're not leaving the ship, father," continued

Rosey impetuously. "You have n't sold it to that man Sleight?"

Mr. Nott rose and carefully closed the cabin door. Then drawing a large wallet from his pocket, he said, "It 's sing'lar ye should hev got the name right the first pop, ain't it, Rosey? but it 's Sleight sure enough, all the time. This yer check," he added, producing a paper from the depths of the wallet, — "this yer check for $25,000 is wot he paid for it only two hours ago."

"But," said Renshaw, springing to his feet furiously, "you 're duped, swindled — betrayed!"

"Young man," said Nott, throwing a certain dignity into his habitual gesture of placing his hands on Renshaw's shoulders, "I bought this yer ship five years ago jist ez she stood for $8000. Kalkilatin' wot she cost me in repairs and taxes, and wot she brought me in since then, accordin' to my figgerin', I don't call a clear profit of $15,000 much of a swindle."

"Tell him all," said Rosey quickly, more alarmed at Renshaw's despairing face than at the news itself. "Tell him everything, Dick — Mr. Renshaw; it may not be too late."

In a voice half choked with passionate indignation Renshaw hurriedly repeated the story of the hidden treasure, and the plot to rescue it, prompted frequently by Rosey's tenacious memory and assisted by her deft and tactful explanations. But to their surprise the imperturbable countenance of Abner Nott never altered; a slight moisture of kindly paternal tolerance of their extravagance glistened in his little eyes, but nothing more.

"Ef there was a part o' this ship, a plank or a bolt ez I don't know, ez I hev n't touched with my own hand, and looked into with my own eyes, thar might be suthin' in that story. I don't let on to be a sailor like *you*, but ez I know the ship ez a boy knows his first hoss, as a wo-

man knows her first babby, I reckon thar ain't no treasure yer onless it was brought into the Pontiac last night by them chaps."

"But are you mad? Sleight would not pay three times the value of the ship to-day if he were not positive! And that positive knowledge was gained last night by the villain who broke into the Pontiac — no doubt the Lascar."

"Surely," said Nott meditatively. "The Lascar! There 's suthin' in that. That Lascar I fastened down in the hold last night unbeknownst to you, Mr. Renshaw, and let him out again this morning ekally unbeknownst."

"And you let him carry his information to Sleight — without a word!" said Renshaw, with a sickening sense of Nott's utter fatuity.

"I sent him back with a message to the man he kem from," said Nott, winking both his eyes at Renshaw significantly, and making signs behind his daughter's back.

Rosey, conscious of her lover's irritation, and more eager to soothe his impatience than from any faith in her suggestion, interfered. "Why not examine the place where he was concealed? he may have left some traces of his search."

The two men looked at each other. "Seein' ez I 've turned the Pontiac over to Sleight jist as it stands, I don't know ez it 's 'zactly on the square," said Nott doubtfully.

"You 've a right to know at least *what* you deliver to him," interrupted Renshaw brusquely. "Bring a lantern."

Followed by Rosey, Renshaw and Nott hurriedly sought the lower deck and the open hatch of the forehold. The two men leaped down first with the lantern, and then assisted Rosey to descend. Renshaw took a step forward and uttered a cry.

The rays of the lantern fell on the ship's side. The Lascar had, during his forced seclusion, put back the boxes of treasure and replaced the planking, yet not so carefully but that the quick eye of Renshaw had discovered it. The

next moment he had stripped away the planking again, and the hurriedly restored box which the Lascar had found fell to the deck, scattering part of its ringing contents. Rosey turned pale; Renshaw's eyes flashed fire; only Abner Nott remained quiet and impassive.

"Are you satisfied you have been duped?" said Renshaw passionately.

To their surprise Mr. Nott stooped down, and picking up one of the coins, handed it gravely to Renshaw. "Would ye mind heftin' that 'ere coin in your hand — feelin' it, bitin' it, scrapin' it with a knife, and kinder seein' how it compares with other coins?"

"What do you mean?" said Renshaw.

"I mean that that yer coin — that *all* the coins in this yer box, that all the coins in them other boxes — and thar 's forty on 'em —is all and every one of 'em counterfeits!"

The piece dropped unconsciously from Renshaw's hand, and striking another that lay on the deck, gave out a dull, suspicious ring.

"They waz counterfeits got up by them Dutch supercargo sharps for dealin' with the Injins and cannibals and South Sea heathens ez bows down to wood and stone. It satisfied them ez well ez them buttons ye puts in missionary boxes, I reckon, and, 'cepting ez freight, don't cost nothin'. I found 'em tucked in the ribs o' the old Pontiac when I bought her, and I nailed 'em up in thar lest they should fall into dishonest hands. It 's a lucky thing, Mr. Renshaw, that they comes into the honest fingers of a square man like Sleight — ain't it?"

He turned his small, guileless eyes upon Renshaw with such childlike simplicity that it checked the hysterical laugh that was rising to the young man's lips.

"But did any one know of this but yourself?"

"I reckon not. I once suspicioned that old Cap'en

Bower, who was always foolin' round the hold yer, must hev noticed the bulge in the casin', but when he took to axin' questions I axed others — ye know my style, Rosey? Come."

He led the way grimly back to the cabin, the young people following; but turning suddenly at the companion-way, he observed Renshaw's arm around the waist of his daughter. He said nothing until they had reached the cabin, when he closed the door softly, and, looking at them both gently, said with infinite cunning: —

"Ef it isn't too late, Rosey, ye kin tell this young man ez how I forgive him for havin' diskivered THE TREASURE of the Pontiac."

. . . . . .

It was nearly eighteen months afterwards that Mr. Nott one morning entered the room of his son-in-law at Madroño Cottage. Drawing him aside, he said, with his old air of mystery, "Now ez Rosey 's ailin' and don't seem to be so eager to diskiver what 's become of Mr. Ferrers, I don't mind tellin' ye that over a year ago I heard he died suddenly in Sacramento. Thar was suthin' in the paper about his bein' a lunatic and claimin' to be a relation to somebody on the Pontiac; but likes ez not it 's only the way those newspaper fellows got hold of the story of his wantin' to marry Rosey."

AN APOSTLE OF THE TULES

I

On October 10, 1856, about four hundred people were camped in Tasajara Valley, California. It could not have been for the prospect, since a more barren, dreary, monotonous, and uninviting landscape never stretched before human eye; it could not have been for convenience or contiguity, as the nearest settlement was thirty miles away; it could not have been for health or salubrity, as the breath of the ague-haunted tules in the outlying Stockton marshes swept through the valley; it could not have been for space or comfort, for, encamped on an unlimited plain, men and women were huddled together as closely as in an urban tenement-house, without the freedom or decency of rural isolation; it could not have been for pleasant companionship, as dejection, mental anxiety, tears, and lamentation were the dominant expression; it was not a hurried flight from present or impending calamity, for the camp had been deliberately planned, and for a week pioneer wagons had been slowly arriving; it was not an irrevocable exodus, for some had already returned to their homes that others might take their places. It was simply a religious revival of one or two denominational sects, known as a "camp-meeting."

A large central tent served for the assembling of the principal congregation; smaller tents served for prayer-meetings and class-rooms, known to the few unbelievers as "side-shows;" while the actual dwellings of the worshipers were rudely extemporized shanties of boards and canvas, sometimes mere corrals or inclosures open to the cloudless

sky, or more often the unhitched covered wagon which had brought them there. The singular resemblance to a circus, already profanely suggested, was carried out by a straggling fringe of boys and half-grown men on the outskirts of the encampment, acrimonious with disappointed curiosity, lazy without the careless ease of vagrancy, and vicious without the excitement of dissipation. For the coarse poverty and brutal economy of the larger arrangements, the dreary panorama of unlovely and unwholesome domestic details always before the eyes, were hardly exciting to the senses. The circus might have been more dangerous, but scarcely more brutalizing. The actors themselves, hard and aggressive through practical struggles, often warped and twisted with chronic forms of smaller diseases, or malformed and crippled through carelessness and neglect, and restless and uneasy through some vague mental distress and inquietude that they had added to their burdens, were scarcely amusing performers. The rheumatic Parkinsons, from Green Springs; the ophthalmic Filgees, from Alder Creek; the ague-stricken Harneys, from Martinez Bend; and the feeble-limbed Steptons, from Sugar Mill, might, in their combined families, have suggested a hospital, rather than any other social assemblage. Even their companionship, which had little of cheerful fellowship in it, would have been grotesque but for the pathetic instinct of some mutual vague appeal from the hardness of their lives and the helplessness of their conditions that had brought them together. Nor was this appeal to a Higher Power any the less pathetic that it bore no reference whatever to their respective needs or deficiencies, but was always an invocation for a light which, when they believed they had found it, to unregenerate eyes scarcely seemed to illumine the rugged path in which their feet were continually stumbling. One might have smiled at the idea of the vendetta-following Ferguses praying for

"justification by Faith," but the actual spectacle of old Simon Fergus, whose shot-gun was still in his wagon, offering up that appeal with streaming eyes and agonized features, was painful beyond a doubt. To seek and obtain an exaltation of feeling vaguely known as "It," or less vaguely veiling a sacred name, was the burden of the general appeal.

The large tent had been filled, and between the exhortations a certain gloomy enthusiasm had been kept up by singing, which had the effect of continuing in an easy, rhythmical, impersonal, and irresponsible way the sympathies of the meeting. This was interrupted by a young man who rose suddenly with that spontaneity of impulse which characterized the speakers; but unlike his predecessors, he remained for a moment mute, trembling, and irresolute. The fatal hesitation seemed to check the unreasoning, monotonous flow of emotion and to recall to some extent the reason and even the criticism of the worshipers. He stammered a prayer whose earnestness was undoubted, whose humility was but too apparent, but his words fell on faculties already benumbed by repetition and rhythm. A slight movement of curiosity in the rear benches, and a whisper that it was the maiden effort of a new preacher, helped to prolong the interruption. A heavy man of strong physical expression sprang to the rescue with a hysterical cry of "Glory!" and a tumultuous fluency of epithet and sacred adjuration. Still the meeting wavered. With one final paroxysmal cry, the powerful man threw his arms around his nearest neighbor and burst into silent tears. An anxious hush followed; the speaker still continued to sob on his neighbor's shoulder. Almost before the fact could be commented upon, it was noticed that the entire rank of worshipers on the bench beside him were crying also ; the second and third rows were speedily dissolved in tears, until even the very youthful scoffers in the

last benches suddenly found their half-hysterical laughter turned to sobs. The danger was averted, the reaction was complete; the singing commenced, and in a few moments the hapless cause of the interruption and the man who had retrieved the disaster stood together outside the tent. A horse was picketed near them.

The victor was still panting from his late exertions, and was more or less diluvial in eye and nostril, but neither eye nor nostril bore the slightest tremor of other expression. His face was stolid and perfectly in keeping with his physique, — heavy, animal, and unintelligent.

"Ye oughter trusted in the Lord," he said to the young preacher.

"But I did," responded the young man earnestly.

"That 's it. Justifyin' yourself by works instead o' leanin' onto Him! Find Him, sez you! Git Him, sez you! Works is vain. Glory! glory!" he continued, with fluent vacuity and wandering, dull, observant eyes.

"But if I had a little more practice in class, Brother Silas, more education?"

"The letter killeth," interrupted Brother Silas. Here his wandering eyes took dull cognizance of two female faces peering through the opening of the tent. "No, yer mishun, Brother Gideon, is to seek Him in the byways, in the wilderness, — where the foxes hev holes and the ravens hev their young, — but not in the Temples of the people. Wot sez Sister Parsons?"

One of the female faces detached itself from the tent flaps, which it nearly resembled in color, and brought forward an angular figure clothed in faded fustian that had taken the various shades and odors of household service.

"Brother Silas speaks well," said Sister Parsons, with stridulous fluency. "It 's foreordained. Fore-ordinashun is better nor ordinashun, saith the Lord. He shall go forth, turnin' neither to the right hand nor the left hand,

and seek Him among the lost tribes and the ungodly. He shall put aside the temptashun of Mammon and the flesh." Her eyes and those of Brother Silas here both sought the other female face, which was that of a young girl of seventeen.

"Wot sez little Sister Meely, — wot sez Meely Parsons?" continued Brother Silas, as if repeating an unctuous formula.

The young girl came hesitatingly forward, and with a nervous cry of "Oh, Gideon!" threw herself on the breast of the young man.

For a moment they remained locked in each other's arms. In the promiscuous and fraternal embracings which were a part of the devotional exercises of the hour, the act passed without significance. The young man gently raised her face. She was young and comely, albeit marked with a half-frightened, half-vacant sorrow. "Amen!" said Brother Gideon gravely.

He mounted his horse and turned to go. Brother Silas had clasped his powerful arms around both women, and was holding them in a ponderous embrace.

"Go forth, young man, into the wilderness."

The young man bowed his head, and urged his horse forward in the bleak and barren plain. In half an hour every vestige of the camp and its unwholesome surroundings was lost in the distance. It was as if the strong desiccating wind, which seemed to spring up at his horse's feet, had cleanly erased the flimsy structures from the face of the plain, swept away the lighter breath of praise and plaint, and dried up the easy flowing tears. The air was harsh but pure; the grim economy of form and shade and color in the level plain was coarse but not vulgar; the sky above him was cold and distant but not repellent; the moisture that had been denied his eyes at the prayer-meeting overflowed them here; the words that had choked his utterance

an hour ago now rose to his lips. He threw himself from his horse, and kneeling in the withered grass, — a mere atom in the boundless plain, — lifted his pale face against the irresponsive blue and prayed.

He prayed that the unselfish dream of his bitter boyhood, his disappointed youth, might come to pass. He prayed that he might in higher hands become the humble instrument of good to his fellow man. He prayed that the deficiencies of his scant education, his self-taught learning, his helpless isolation, and his inexperience might be overlooked or reinforced by grace. He prayed that the Infinite Compassion might enlighten his ignorance and solitude with a manifestation of the Spirit; in his very weakness he prayed for some special revelation, some sign or token, some visitation or gracious unbending from that coldly lifting sky. The low sun burned the black edge of the distant tules with dull eating fires as he prayed, lit the dwarfed hills with a brief but ineffectual radiance, and then died out. The lingering trade winds fired a few volleys over its grave, and then lapsed into a chilly silence. The young man staggered to his feet; it was quite dark now, but the coming night had advanced a few starry vedettes so near the plain they looked like human watchfires. For an instant he could not remember where he was. Then a light trembled far down at the entrance of the valley. Brother Gideon recognized it. It was in the lonely farmhouse of the widow of the last Circuit preacher.

II

The abode of the late Reverend Marvin Hiler remained in the disorganized condition he had left it when removed from his sphere of earthly uselessness and continuous accident. The straggling fence that only half inclosed the house and barn had stopped at that point where the two deacons who had each volunteered to do a day's work on

it had completed their allotted time. The building of the barn had been arrested when the half load of timber contributed by Sugar Mill brethren was exhausted, and three windows given by "Christian Seekers" at Martinez painfully accented the boarded spaces for the other three that "Unknown Friends" in Tasajara had promised but not yet supplied. In the clearing some trees that had been felled but not taken away added to the general incompleteness.

Something of this unfinished character clung to the Widow Hiler and asserted itself in her three children, one of whom was consistently posthumous. Prematurely old and prematurely disappointed, she had all the inexperience of girlhood with the cares of maternity, and kept in her family circle the freshness of an old maid's misogynistic antipathies with a certain guilty and remorseful consciousness of widowhood. She supported the meagre household to which her husband had contributed only the extra mouths to feed with reproachful astonishment and weary incapacity. She had long since grown tired of trying to make both ends meet of which she declared "the Lord had taken one." During her two years' widowhood she had waited on Providence, who by a pleasing local fiction had been made responsible for the disused and cast-off furniture and clothing which, accompanied with scriptural texts, found their way mysteriously into her few habitable rooms. The providential manna was not always fresh; the ravens who fed her and her little ones with flour from the Sugar Mills did not always select the best quality. Small wonder that, sitting by her lonely hearthstone, — a borrowed stove that supplemented the unfinished fireplace, — surrounded by her mismatched furniture and clad in misfitting garments, she had contracted a habit of sniffling during her dreary watches. In her weaker moments she attributed it to grief; in her stronger intervals she knew that it sprang from damp and draught.

In her apathy the sound of horses' hoofs at her unprotected door even at that hour neither surprised nor alarmed her. She lifted her head as the door opened, and the pale face of Gideon Deane looked into the room. She moved aside the cradle she was rocking, and taking a saucepan and teacup from a chair beside her, absently dusted it with her apron, and pointing to the vacant seat, said, "Take a chair" as quietly as if he had stepped from the next room instead of the outer darkness.

"I 'll put up my horse first," said Gideon gently.

"So do," responded the widow briefly.

Gideon led his horse across the inclosure, stumbling over the heaps of rubbish, dried chips, and weather-beaten shavings with which it was strewn, until he reached the unfinished barn, where he temporarily bestowed his beast. Then taking a rusty axe, by the faint light of the stars, he attacked one of the fallen trees with such energy that at the end of ten minutes he reappeared at the door with an armful of cut boughs and chips, which he quietly deposited behind the stove. Observing that he was still standing as if looking for something, the widow lifted her eyes and said, "Ef it 's the bucket, I reckon ye 'll find it at the spring, where one of them foolish Filgee boys left it. I 've been that tuckered out sens sundown, I ain't had the ambition to go and tote it back." Without a word Gideon repaired to the spring, filled the missing bucket, replaced the hoop on the loosened staves of another he found lying useless beside it, and again returned to the house. The widow once more pointed to the chair, and Gideon sat down. "It 's quite a spell sens you wos here," said the Widow Hiler, returning her foot to the cradle-rocker; "not sens yer was ordained. Be'n practicin', I reckon, at the meetin'."

A slight color came into his cheek. "My place is not there, Sister Hiler," he said gently; "it 's for those with

the gift o' tongues. I go forth only a common laborer in the vineyard." He stopped and hesitated; he might have said more, but the widow, who was familiar with that kind of humility as the ordinary perfunctory expression of her class, suggested no sympathetic interest in his mission.

"Thar 's a deal o' talk over there," she said dryly, "and thar 's folks ez thinks thar 's a deal o' money spent in picnicking the Gospel that might be given to them ez wish to spread it, or to their widows and children. But that don't consarn you, Brother Gideon. Sister Parsons hez money enough to settle her darter Meely comfortably on her own land; and I 've heard tell that you and Meely was only waitin' till you was ordained to be jined together. You 'll hev an easier time of it, Brother Gideon, than poor Marvin Hiler had," she continued, suppressing her tears with a certain astringency that took the place of her lost pride; "but the Lord wills that some should be tried and some not."

"But I am not going to marry Meely Parsons," said Gideon quietly.

The widow took her foot from the rocker. "Not marry Meely!" she repeated vaguely. But relapsing into her despondent mood, she continued: "Then I reckon it 's true what other folks sez of Brother Silas Braggley makin' up to her and his powerful exhortin' influence over her ma. Folks sez ez Sister Parsons hez just resigned her soul inter his keepin'."

"Brother Silas hez a heavenly gift," said the young man, with gentle enthusiasm; "and perhaps it may be so. If it is, it is the Lord's will. But I do not marry Meely because my life and my ways henceforth must lie far beyond her sphere of strength. I ought n't to drag a young, inexperienced soul with me to battle and struggle in the thorny paths that I must tread."

"I reckon you know your own mind," said Sister Hiler

grimly. "But thar 's folks ez might allow that Meely Parsons ain't any better than others, that she should n't have her share o' trials and keers and crosses. Riches and bringin' up don't exempt folks from the shadder. *I* married Marvin Hiler outer a house ez good ez Sister Parsons', and at a time when old Cyrus Parsons had n't a roof to his head but the cover of the emigrant wagon he kem across the plains in. I might say ez Marvin knowed pretty well wot it was to have a helpmeet in his ministration, if it was n't vanity of sperit to say it now. But the flesh is weak, Brother Gideon." Her influenza here resolved itself into unmistakable tears, which she wiped away with the first article that was accessible in the work-bag before her. As it chanced to be a black silk neckerchief of the deceased Hiler, the result was funereal, suggestive, but practically ineffective.

"You were a good wife to Brother Hiler," said the young man gently. "Everybody knows that."

"It 's suthin' to think of since he 's gone," continued the widow, bringing her work nearer to her eyes to adjust it to their tear-dimmed focus. "It 's suthin' to lay to heart in the lonely days and nights when thar 's no man round to fetch water and wood and lend a hand to doin' chores; it 's suthin' to remember, with his three children to feed, and little Selby, the eldest, that vain and useless that he can't even tote the baby round while I do the work of a hired man."

"It 's a hard trial, Sister Hiler," said Gideon, "but the Lord has His appointed time."

Familiar as consolation by vague quotation was to Sister Hiler, there was an occult sympathy in the tone in which this was offered that lifted her for an instant out of her narrower self. She raised her eyes to his. The personal abstraction of the devotee had no place in the deep dark eyes that were lifted from the cradle to hers with a sad,

discriminating, and almost womanly sympathy. Surprised out of her selfish preoccupation, she was reminded of her apparent callousness to what might be his present disappointment. Perhaps it seemed strange to her, too, that those tender eyes should go a-begging.

"Yer takin' a Christian view of yer own disappointment, Brother Gideon," she said, with less astringency of manner; "but every heart knoweth its own sorrer. I 'll be gettin' supper now that the baby 's sleepin' sound, and ye 'll sit by and eat."

"If you let me help you, Sister Hiler," said the young man with a cheerfulness that belied any overwhelming heart affection, and awakened in the widow a feminine curiosity as to his real feelings to Meely. But her further questioning was met with a frank, amiable, and simple brevity that was as puzzling as the most artful periphrase of tact. Accustomed as she was to the loquacity of grief and the confiding prolixity of disappointed lovers, she could not understand her guest's quiescent attitude. Her curiosity, however, soon gave way to the habitual contemplation of her own sorrows, and she could not forego the opportune presence of a sympathizing auditor to whom she could relieve her feelings. The preparations for the evening meal were therefore accompanied by a dreary monotone of lamentation. She bewailed her lost youth, her brief courtship, the struggles of her early married life, her premature widowhood, her penurious and helpless existence, the disruption of all her present ties, the hopelessness of the future. She rehearsed the unending plaint of those long evenings, set to the music of the restless wind around her bleak dwelling, with something of its stridulous reiteration. The young man listened, and replied with softly assenting eyes, but without pausing in the material aid that he was quietly giving her. He had removed the cradle of the sleeping child to the bedroom, quieted the sudden

wakefulness of "Pinkey," rearranged the straggling furniture of the sitting-room with much order and tidiness, repaired the hinges of a rebellious shutter and the lock of an unyielding door, and yet had apparently retained an unabated interest in her spoken woes. Surprised once more into recognizing this devotion, Sister Hiler abruptly arrested her monologue.

"Well, if you ain't the handiest man I ever seed about a house!"

"Am I?" said Gideon, with suddenly sparkling eyes. "Do you really think so?"

"I do."

"Then you don't know how glad I am." His frank face so unmistakably showed his simple gratification that the widow, after gazing at him for a moment, was suddenly seized with a bewildering fancy. The first effect of it was the abrupt withdrawal of her eyes, then a sudden effusion of blood to her forehead that finally extended to her cheek-bones, and then an interval of forgetfulness where she remained with a plate held vaguely in her hand. When she succeeded at last in putting it on the table instead of the young man's lap, she said in a voice quite unlike her own: —

"Sho!"

"I mean it," said Gideon cheerfully. After a pause, in which he unostentatiously rearranged the table which the widow was abstractedly disorganizing, he said gently, "After tea, when you 're not so much flustered with work and worry, and more composed in spirit, we 'll have a little talk, Sister Hiler. I 'm in no hurry to-night, and if you don't mind I 'll make myself comfortable in the barn with my blanket until sunup to-morrow. I can get up early enough to do some odd chores round the lot before I go."

"You know best, Brother Gideon," said the widow faintly, "and if you think it 's the Lord's will, and no

speshal trouble to you, so do. But sakes alive! it 's time I tidied myself a little," she continued, lifting one hand to her hair, while with the other she endeavored to fasten a buttonless collar; "leavin' alone the vanities o' dress, it 's ez much as one can do to keep a clean rag on with the children climbin' over ye. Sit by, and I 'll be back in a minit." She retired to the back room, and in a few moments returned with smoothed hair and a palm-leaf broché shawl thrown over her shoulders, which not only concealed the ravages made by time and maternity on the gown beneath, but to some extent gave her the suggestion of being a casual visitor in her own household. It must be confessed that for the rest of the evening Sister Hiler rather lent herself to this idea, possibly from the fact that it temporarily obliterated the children, and quite removed her from any responsibility in the unpicturesque household. This effect was only marred by the absence of any impression upon Gideon, who scarcely appeared to notice the change, and whose soft eyes seemed rather to identify the miserable woman under her forced disguise. He prefaced the meal with a fervent grace, to which the widow listened with something of the conscious attitude she had adopted at church during her late husband's ministration, and during the meal she ate with a like consciousness of "company manners."

Later that evening Selby Hiler woke up in his little truckle bed, listening to the rising midnight wind, which in his childish fancy he confounded with the sound of voices that came through the open door of the living-room. He recognized the deep voice of the young minister, Gideon, and the occasional tearful responses of his mother, and he was fancying himself again at church when he heard a step, and the young preacher seemed to enter the room, and going to the bed leaned over it and kissed him on the forehead, and then bent over his little brother and sister

and kissed them too. Then he slowly reëntered the living-room. Lifting himself softly on his elbow, Selby saw him go up towards his mother, who was crying, with her head on the table, and kiss her also on the forehead. Then he said "Good-night," and the front door closed, and Selby heard his footsteps crossing the lot towards the barn. His mother was still sitting with her face buried in her hands when he fell asleep.

She sat by the dying embers of the fire until the house was still again; then she rose and wiped her eyes. "Et 's a good thing," she said, going to the bedroom door, and looking in upon her sleeping children; "et 's a mercy and a blessing for them and — for — me. But — but — he might — hev — said — he — loved me!"

III

Although Gideon Deane contrived to find a nest for his blanket in the mouldy straw of the unfinished barn loft, he could not sleep. He restlessly watched the stars through the cracks of the boarded roof, and listened to the wind that made the half-open structure as vocal as a sea-shell, until past midnight. Once or twice he had fancied he heard the tramp of horse-hoofs on the far-off trail, and now it seemed to approach nearer, mingled with the sound of voices. Gideon raised his head and looked through the doorway of the loft. He was not mistaken; two men had halted in the road before the house, and were examining it as if uncertain if it were the dwelling they were seeking, and were hesitating if they should rouse the inmates. Thinking he might spare the widow this disturbance to her slumbers, and possibly some alarm, he rose quickly, and descending to the inclosure walked towards the house. As he approached the men advanced to meet him, and by accident or design ranged themselves on either side. A glance showed him they were strangers to the locality.

"We 're lookin' fer the preacher that lives here," said one, who seemed to be the elder. "A man by the name o' Hiler, I reckon!"

"Brother Hiler has been dead two years," responded Gideon. "His widow and children live here."

The two men looked at each other. The younger one laughed; the elder mumbled something about its being "three years ago," and then turning suddenly on Gideon, said: —

"P'r'aps *you 're* a preacher?"

"I am."

"Can you come to a dying man?"

"I will."

The two men again looked at each other. "But," continued Gideon softly, "you 'll please keep quiet so as not to disturb the widow and her children while I get my horse." He turned away; the younger man made a movement as if to stop him, but the elder quickly restrained his hand. "He isn't goin' to run away," he whispered. "Look," he added, as Gideon a moment later reappeared mounted and equipped.

"Do you think we 'll be in time?" asked the young preacher as they rode quickly away in the direction of the tules.

The younger repressed a laugh; the other answered grimly, "I reckon."

"And is he conscious of his danger?"

"I reckon."

Gideon did not speak again. But as the onus of that silence seemed to rest upon the other two, the last speaker, after a few moments' silent and rapid riding, continued abruptly, "You don't seem curious?"

"Of what?" said Gideon, lifting his soft eyes to the speaker. "You tell me of a brother at the point of death, who seeks the Lord through an humble vessel like myself. *He* will tell me the rest."

A silence still more constrained on the part of the two strangers followed, which they endeavored to escape from by furious riding; so that in half an hour the party had reached a point where the tules began to sap the arid plain, while beyond them broadened the lagoons of the distant river. In the foreground, near a clump of dwarfed willows, a camp-fire was burning, around which fifteen or twenty armed men were collected, their horses picketed in an outer circle guarded by two mounted sentries. A blasted cottonwood with a single black arm extended over the tules stood ominously against the dark sky.

The circle opened to receive them and closed again. The elder man dismounted, and leading Gideon to the blasted cottonwood, pointed to a pinioned man seated at its foot with an armed guard over him. He looked up at Gideon with an amused smile.

"You said it was a dying man," said Gideon, recoiling.

"He will be a dead man in half an hour," returned the stranger.

"And you?"

"We are the Vigilantes from Alamo. This man," pointing to the prisoner, "is a gambler who killed a man yesterday. We hunted him here, tried him an hour ago, and found him guilty. The last man we hung here, three years ago, asked for a parson. We brought him the man who used to live where we found you. So we thought we 'd give this man the same show, and brought you."

"And if I refuse?" said Gideon.

The leader shrugged his shoulders.

"That 's *his* lookout, not ours. We 've given him the chance. Drive ahead, boys," he added, turning to the others; "the parson allows he won't take a hand."

"One moment," said Gideon, in desperation, "one moment, for the sake of that God you have brought me here to invoke in behalf of this wretched man. One moment,

for the sake of Him in whose presence you must stand one day as he does now." With passionate earnestness he pointed out the vindictive impulse they were mistaking for Divine justice; with pathetic fervency he fell upon his knees and implored their mercy for the culprit. But in vain. As at the camp-meeting of the day before, he was chilled to find his words seemed to fall on unheeding and unsympathetic ears. He looked around on their abstracted faces; in their gloomy savage enthusiasm for expiatory sacrifice, he was horrified to find the same unreasoning exaltation that had checked his exhortations then. Only one face looked upon his, half mischievously, half compassionately. It was the prisoner's.

"Yer wastin' time on us," said the leader dryly; "wastin' *his* time. Had n't you better talk to him?"

Gideon rose to his feet, pale and cold. "He may have something to confess. May I speak with him alone?" he said gently.

The leader motioned to the sentry to fall back. Gideon placed himself before the prisoner so that in the faint light of the camp-fire the man's figure was partly hidden by his own. "You meant well with your little bluff, pardner," said the prisoner, not unkindly, "but they 've got the cards to win."

"Kneel down with your back to me," said Gideon in a low voice. The prisoner fell on his knees. At the same time he felt Gideon's hand and the gliding of steel behind his back, and the severed cords hung loosely on his arms and legs.

"When I lift my voice to God, brother," said Gideon softly, "drop on your face and crawl as far as you can in a straight line in my shadow, then break for the tules. I will stand between you and their first fire."

"Are you mad?" said the prisoner. "Do you think they won't fire lest they should hurt you? Man! they 'll kill *you*, the first thing."

Break for the Tules

they had come to save fell forward in Gideon's arms with a bullet in his breast — the Parthian shot of the flying Vigilante leader.

The eager crowd that surged around him with outstretched, helping hands would have hustled Gideon aside. But the wounded man roused himself, and throwing an arm around the young preacher's neck, warned them back with the other. "Stand back!" he gasped. "He risked his life for mine! Look at him, boys! Wanted ter stand up 'twixt them hounds and me and draw their fire on himself! Ain't he just hell?" he stopped; an apologetic smile crossed his lips. "I clean forgot, pardner; but it 's all right. I said I was ready to go; and I am." His arm slipped from Gideon's neck; he slid to the ground; he had fainted.

A dark, military-looking man pushed his way through the crowd — the surgeon, one of the posse, accompanied by a younger man fastidiously dressed. The former bent over the unconscious prisoner, and tore open his shirt; the latter followed his movements with a flush of anxious inquiry in his handsome, careless face. After a moment's pause the surgeon, without looking up, answered the young man's mute questioning. "Better send the sheriff here at once, Jack."

"He is here," responded the official, joining the group.

The surgeon looked up at him. "I am afraid they 've put the case out of your jurisdiction, sheriff," he said grimly. "It 's only a matter of a day or two at best — perhaps only a few hours. But he won't live to be taken back to jail."

"Will he live to go as far as Martinez?" asked the young man addressed as Jack.

"With care, perhaps."

"Will you be responsible for him, Jack Hamlin?" said the sheriff suddenly.

"I will."

"Then take him. Stay, he 's coming to."

The wounded man slowly opened his eyes. They fell upon Jack Hamlin with a pleased look of recognition, but almost instantly and anxiously glanced around as if seeking another. Leaning over him, Jack said gayly, "They 've passed you over to me, old man; are you willing?"

The wounded man's eyes assented, but still moved restlessly from side to side.

"Is there any one you want to go with you?"

"Yes," said the eyes.

"The doctor, of course?"

The eyes did not answer. Gideon dropped on his knees beside him. A ray of light flashed in the helpless man's eyes and transfigured his whole face.

"You want *him?*" said Jack incredulously.

"Yes," said the eyes.

"What — the preacher?"

The lips struggled to speak. Everybody bent down to hear his reply.

"You bet," he said faintly.

IV

It was early morning when the wagon containing the wounded man, Gideon, Jack Hamlin, and the surgeon crept slowly through the streets of Martinez and stopped before the door of the "Palmetto Shades." The upper floor of this saloon and hostelry was occupied by Mr. Hamlin as his private lodgings, and was fitted up with the usual luxury and more than the usual fastidiousness of his extravagant class. As the dusty and travel-worn party trod the soft carpets and brushed aside the silken hangings in their slow progress with their helpless burden to the lace-canopied and snowy couch of the young gambler, it seemed almost a profanation of some feminine seclusion. Gideon,

to whom such luxury was unknown, was profoundly troubled. The voluptuous ease and sensuousness, the refinements of a life of irresponsible indulgence, affected him with a physical terror to which in his late moment of real peril he had been a stranger; the gilding and mirrors blinded his eyes; even the faint perfume seemed to him an unhallowed incense, and turned him sick and giddy. Accustomed as he had been to disease and misery in their humblest places and meanest surroundings, the wounded desperado lying in laces and fine linen seemed to him monstrous and unnatural. It required all his self-abnegation, all his sense of duty, all his deep pity, and all the instinctive tact which was born of his gentle thoughtfulness for others, to repress a shrinking. But when the miserable cause of all again opened his eyes and sought Gideon's hand, he forgot it all. Happily, Hamlin, who had been watching him with wondering but critical eyes, mistook his concern. "Don't you worry about that gin-mill and hash-gymnasium downstairs," he said. "I've given the proprietor a thousand dollars to shut up shop as long as this thing lasts." That this was done from some delicate sense of respect to the preacher's domiciliary presence, and not entirely to secure complete quiet and seclusion for the invalid, was evident from the fact that Mr. Hamlin's drawing and dining rooms, and even the hall, were filled with eager friends and inquirers. It was discomposing to Gideon to find himself almost an equal subject of interest and curiosity to the visitors. The story of his simple devotion had lost nothing by report; hats were doffed in his presence that might have grown to their wearers' heads; the boldest eyes dropped as he passed by; he had only to put his pale face out of the bedroom door and the loudest discussion, heated by drink or affection, fell to a whisper. The surgeon, who had recognized the one dominant wish of the hopelessly sinking man, gravely retired, leav-

ing Gideon a few simple instructions and directions for their use. "He 'll last as long as he has need of you," he said respectfully. "My art is only second here. God help you both! When he wakes, make the most of your time."

In a few moments he did waken, and as before turned his fading look almost instinctively on the faithful, gentle eyes that were watching him. How Gideon made the most of his time did not transpire, but at the end of an hour, when the dying man had again lapsed into unconsciousness, he softly opened the door of the sitting-room.

Hamlin started hastily to his feet. He had cleared the room of his visitors, and was alone. He turned a moment towards the window before he faced Gideon with inquiring but curiously shining eyes.

"Well?" he said hesitatingly.

"Do you know Kate Somers?" asked Gideon.

Hamlin opened his brown eyes. "Yes."

"Can you send for her?"

"What, *here?*"

"Yes, here."

"What for?"

"To marry him," said Gideon gently. "There 's no time to lose."

"To *marry* him?"

"He wishes it."

"But say — oh, come, now," said Hamlin confidentially, leaning back with his hands on the top of a chair. "Ain't this playing it a little — just a *little* — too low down? Of course you mean well, and all that; but come, now, say — could n't you just let up on him there? Why, she" — Hamlin softly closed the door — "she 's got no character."

"The more reason he should give her one."

A cynical knowledge of matrimony imparted to him by the wives of others evidently colored Mr. Hamlin's views. "Well, perhaps it 's all the same if he's going to die.

But is n't it rather rough on *her?* I don't know," he added reflectively; "she was sniveling round here a little while ago, until I sent her away."

"You sent her away!" echoed Gideon.

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because *you* were here."

Nevertheless Mr. Hamlin departed, and in half an hour reappeared with two brilliantly dressed women. One, hysterical, tearful, frightened, and pallid, was the destined bride; the other, highly colored, excited, and pleasedly observant, was her friend. Two men hastily summoned from the anteroom as witnesses completed the group that moved into the bedroom and gathered round the bed.

The ceremony was simple and brief. It was well, for of all who took part in it none was more shaken by emotion than the officiating priest. The brilliant dresses of the women, the contrast of their painted faces with the waxen pallor of the dying man; the terrible incongruity of their voices, inflections, expressions, and familiarity; the mingled perfume of cosmetics and the faint odor of wine; the eyes of the younger woman following his movements with strange absorption, so affected him that he was glad when he could fall on his knees at last and bury his face in the pillow of the sufferer. The hand that had been placed in the bride's cold fingers slipped from them and mechanically sought Gideon's again. The significance of the unconscious act brought the first spontaneous tears into the woman's eyes. It was his last act, for when Gideon's voice was again lifted in prayer, the spirit for whom it was offered had risen with it, as it were, still lovingly hand in hand, from the earth forever.

The funeral was arranged for two days later, and Gideon found that his services had been so seriously yet so humbly counted upon by the friends of the dead man that he could

scarce find it in his heart to tell them that it was the function of the local preacher — an older and more experienced man than himself. "If it is," said Jack Hamlin coolly, "I 'm afraid he won't get a yaller dog to come to his church; but if you say you 'll preach at the grave, there ain't a man, woman, or child that will be kept away. Don't you go back on your luck, now; it 's something awful and nigger-like. You 've got this crowd where the hair is short; excuse me, but it 's so. Talk of revivals! You could give that one-horse show in Tasajara a hundred points, and skunk them easily." Indeed had Gideon been accessible to vanity, the spontaneous homage he met with everywhere would have touched him more sympathetically and kindly than it did; but in the utter unconsciousness of his own power and the quality they worshiped in him, he felt alarmed and impatient of what he believed to be their weak sympathy with his own human weakness. In the depth of his unselfish heart, lit, it must be confessed, only by the scant, inefficient lamp of his youthful experience, he really believed he had failed in his apostolic mission because he had been unable to touch the hearts of the Vigilantes by oral appeal and argument. Feeling thus, the reverence of these irreligious people that surrounded him, the facile yielding of their habits and prejudices to his half-uttered wish, appeared to him only a temptation of the flesh. No one had sought him after the manner of the camp-meeting; he had converted the wounded man through a common weakness of their humanity. More than that, he was conscious of a growing fascination for the truthfulness and sincerity of that class; particularly of Mr. Jack Hamlin, whose conversion he felt he could never attempt, yet whose strange friendship alternately thrilled and frightened him.

It was the evening before the funeral. The coffin, half smothered in wreaths and flowers, stood upon trestles in

the anteroom, a large silver plate bearing an inscription on which for the second time Gideon read the name of the man he had converted. It was a name associated on the frontier so often with reckless hardihood, dissipation, and blood, that even now Gideon trembled at his presumption, and was chilled by a momentary doubt of the efficiency of his labor. Drawing unconsciously nearer to the mute subject of his thoughts, he threw his arms across the coffin and buried his face between them.

A stream of soft music, the echo of some forgotten song, seemed to Gideon to suddenly fill and possess the darkened room, and then to slowly die away like the opening and shutting of a door upon a flood of golden radiance. He listened with hushed breath and a beating heart. He had never heard anything like it before. Again the strain arose, the chords swelled round him, until from their midst a tenor voice broke high and steadfast, like a star in troubled skies. Gideon scarcely breathed. It was a hymn — but such a hymn. He had never conceived there could be such beautiful words, joined to such exquisite melody, and sung with a grace so tender and true. What were all other hymns to this ineffable yearning for light, for love, and for infinite rest? Thrilled and exalted, Gideon felt his doubts pierced and scattered by that illuminating cry. Suddenly he rose, and with a troubled thought pushed open the door to the sitting-room. It was Mr. Jack Hamlin sitting before a parlor organ. The music ceased.

"It was *you*," stammered Gideon.

Jack nodded, struck a few chords by way of finish, and then wheeled round on the music-stool towards Gideon. His face was slightly flushed. "Yes. I used to be the organist and tenor in our church in the States. I used to snatch the sinners bald-headed with that. Do you know I reckon I 'll sing that to-morrow, if you like, and maybe afterwards we 'll — but" — he stopped — "we 'll talk of

that after the funeral. It 's business." Seeing Gideon still glancing with a troubled air from the organ to himself, he said: "Would you like to try that hymn with me? Come on!"

He again struck the chords. As the whole room seemed to throb with the music, Gideon felt himself again carried away. Glancing over Jack's shoulders, he could read the words but not the notes; yet, having a quick ear for rhythm, he presently joined in with a deep but uncultivated baritone. Together they forgot everything else, and at the end of an hour were only recalled by the presence of a silently admiring concourse of votive-offering friends who had gathered round them.

The funeral took place the next day at the grave dug in the public cemetery — a green area fenced in by the palisading tules. The words of Gideon were brief but humble; the strongest partisan of the dead man could find no fault in a confession of human frailty in which the speaker humbly confessed his share; and when the hymn was started by Hamlin and taken up by Gideon, the vast multitude, drawn by interest and curiosity, joined as in a solemn Amen.

Later, when those two strangely assorted friends had returned to Mr. Hamlin's rooms previous to Gideon's departure, the former, in a manner more serious than his habitual cynical good humor, began: "I said I had to talk business with you. The boys about here want to build a church for you, and are ready to plank the money down if you 'll say it 's a go. You understand they are n't asking you to run in opposition to that Gospel sharp — excuse me — that 's here now, nor do they want you to run a side show in connection with it. They want you to be independent. They don't pin you down to any kind of religion, you know; whatever you care to give them — Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian — is mighty

good enough for them, if you 'll expound it. You might give a little of each, or one on one day and one another — they 'll never know the difference if you only mix the drinks yourself. They 'll give you a house and guarantee you fifteen hundred dollars the first year."

He stopped and walked towards the window. The sunlight that fell upon his handsome face seemed to call back the careless smile to his lips and the reckless fire to his brown eyes. "I don't suppose there 's a man among them that would n't tell you all this in a great deal better way than I do. But the darned fools — excuse me — would have *me* break it to you. Why, I don't know. I need n't tell you I like you — not only for what you did for George — but I like you for your style — for yourself. And I want you to accept. You could keep these rooms till they got a house ready for you. Together — you and me — we 'd make that organ howl. But because I like it — because it 's everything to us — and nothing to you, it don't seem square for me to ask it. Does it?"

Gideon replied by taking Hamlin's hand. His face was perfectly pale, but his look collected. He had not expected this offer, and yet when it was made he felt as if he had known it before — as if he had been warned of it — as if it was the great temptation of his life. Watching him with an earnestness only slightly overlaid by his usual manner, Hamlin went on: —

"I know it would be lonely here, and a man like you ought to have a wife for" — he slightly lifted his eyebrows — "for example's sake. I heard there was a young lady in the case over there in Tasajara — but the old people did n't see it on account of your position. They 'd jump at it now. Eh? No? Well," continued Jack, with a decent attempt to conceal his cynical relief, "perhaps those boys have been so eager to find out all they could do for you that they 've been sold. Perhaps we 're making

equal fools of ourselves now in asking you to stay. But don't say no just yet — take a day or a week to think of it."

Gideon still pale but calm, cast his eyes around the elegant room, at the magic organ, then upon the slight handsome figure before him. "I *will* think of it," he said in a low voice, as he pressed Jack's hand. "And if I accept you will find me here to-morrow afternoon at this time; if I do not you will know that I keep with me wherever I go the kindness, the brotherly love, and the grace of God that prompts your offer, even though He withholds from me His blessed light, which alone can make me know His wish." He stopped and hesitated. "If you love me, Jack, don't ask me to stay, but pray for that light which alone can guide my feet back to you, or take me hence forever." He once more tightly pressed the hand of the embarrassed man before him and was gone.

Passers-by on the Martinez road that night remembered a mute and ghostly rider who, heedless of hail or greeting, moved by them as in a trance or vision. But the Widow Hiler the next morning, coming from the spring, found no abstraction or preoccupation in the soft eyes of Gideon Deane as he suddenly appeared before her, and gently relieved her of the bucket she was carrying. A quick flush of color over her brow and cheek-bones, as if a hot iron had passed there, and a certain astringent coyness, would have embarrassed any other man than him.

"Sho, it 's *you*. I reck'ned I 'd seen the last of you."

"You don't mean that, Sister Hiler?" said Gideon, with a gentle smile.

"Well, what with the report of your goin's on at Martinez and improvin' the occasion of that sinner's death, and leadin' a revival, I reckoned you 'd hev forgotten low folks at Tasajara. And if your goin' to be settled there in a new church, with new hearers, I reckon you 'll want new

surroundings too. Things change and young folks change with 'em."

They had reached the house. Her breath was quick and short as if she and not Gideon had borne the burden. He placed the bucket in its accustomed place and then gently took her hand in his. The act precipitated the last drop of feeble coquetry she had retained, and the old tears took its place. Let us hope for the last time. For as Gideon stooped and lifted her ailing babe in his strong arms, he said softly, "Whatever God has wrought for me since we parted, I know now He has called me to but one work."

"And that work?" she asked tremulously.

"To watch over the widow and fatherless. And with God's blessing, sister, and His holy ordinance, I am here to stay."

DEVIL'S FORD

CHAPTER I

It was a season of unequaled prosperity in Devil's Ford. The half a dozen cabins scattered along the banks of the North Fork, as if by some overflow of that capricious river, had become augmented during a week of fierce excitement by twenty or thirty others, that were huddled together on the narrow gorge of Devil's Spur, or cast up on its steep sides. So sudden and violent had been the change of fortune, that the dwellers in the older cabins had not had time to change with it, but still kept their old habits, customs, and even their old clothes. The flour-pan in which their daily bread was mixed stood on the rude table side by side with the "prospecting pans," half full of gold washed up from their morning's work; the front windows of the newer tenements looked upon the one single thoroughfare, but the back door opened upon the uncleared wilderness, still haunted by the misshapen bulk of bear or the nightly gliding of catamount.

Neither had success as yet affected their boyish simplicity and the frankness of old frontier habits; they played with their new-found riches with the naïve delight of children, and rehearsed their glowing future with the importance and triviality of schoolboys.

"I 've bin kalklatin'," said Dick Mattingly, leaning on his long-handled shovel with lazy gravity, "that when I go to Rome this winter, I 'll get one o' them marble sharps to chisel me a statoo o' some kind to set up on the spot where we made our big strike. Suthin' to remember it by, you know."

"What kind o' statoo — Washington or Webster?" asked one of the Kearney brothers, without looking up from his work.

"No — I reckon one o' them fancy groups — one o' them Latin goddesses that Fairfax is always gassin' about, sorter leadin', directin', and bossin' us where to dig."

"You 'd make a healthy-lookin' figger in a group," responded Kearney, critically regarding an enormous patch in Mattingly's trousers. "Why don't you have a fountain instead?"

"Where 'll you get the water?" demanded the first speaker, in return. "You know there ain't enough in the North Fork to do a week's washing for the camp — to say nothin' of its color."

"Leave that to me," said Kearney, with self-possession. "When I 've built that there reservoir on Devil's Spur, and bring the water over the ridge from Union Ditch, there 'll be enough to spare for that."

"Better mix it up, I reckon — have suthin' half statoo, half fountain," interposed the elder Mattingly, better known as "Maryland Joe," "and set it up afore the Town Hall and Free Library I 'm kalklatin' to give. Do *that*, and you can count on me."

After some further discussion, it was gravely settled that Kearney should furnish water brought from the Union Ditch twenty miles away, at a cost of two hundred thousand dollars, to feed a memorial fountain erected by Mattingly, worth a hundred thousand dollars, as a crowning finish to public buildings contributed by Maryland Joe, to the extent of half a million more. The disposition of these vast sums by gentlemen wearing patched breeches awakened no sense of the ludicrous, nor did any doubt, reservation, or contingency enter into the plans of the charming enthusiasts themselves. The foundation of their airy castles lay already before them in the strip of rich alluvium

on the river bank, where the North Fork, sharply curving round the base of Devil's Spur, had for centuries swept the detritus of gulch and cañon. They had barely crossed the threshold of this treasure-house, to find themselves rich men; what possibilities of affluence might be theirs when they had fully exploited their possessions! So confident were they of that ultimate prospect, that the wealth already thus obtained was religiously expended in engines and machinery for the boring of wells and the conveyance of that precious water which the exhausted river had long since ceased to yield. It seemed as if the gold they had taken out was by some ironical compensation gradually making its way back to the soil again through ditch and flume and reservoir.

Such was the position of affairs at Devil's Ford on the 13th of August, 1860. It was noon of a hot day. Whatever movement there was in the stifling air was seen rather than felt in a tremulous, quivering, upward-moving dust along the flank of the mountain, through which the spires of the pines were faintly visible. There was no water in the bared and burning bars of the river to reflect the vertical sun, but under its direct rays one or two tinned roofs and corrugated zinc cabins struck fire, a few canvas tents became dazzling to the eye, and the white wooded corral of the stage office and hotel insupportable. For two hours no one ventured in the glare of the open, or even to cross the narrow, unshadowed street, whose dull red dust seemed to glow between the lines of straggling houses. The heated shells of these green unseasoned tenements gave out a pungent odor of scorching wood and resin. The usual hurried, feverish toil in the claim was suspended; the pick and shovel were left sticking in the richest "pay gravel;" the toiling millionaires themselves, ragged, dirty, and perspiring, lay panting under the nearest shade, where their pipes went out listlessly, and conversation sank to monosyllables.

"There 's Fairfax," said Dick Mattingly, at last, with a lazy effort. His face was turned to the hillside, where a man had just emerged from the woods, and was halting irresolutely before the glaring expanse of upheaved gravel and glistening boulders that stretched between him and the shaded group. "He 's going to make a break for it," he added, as the stranger, throwing his linen coat over his head, suddenly started into an Indian trot through the pelting sunbeams toward them. This strange act was perfectly understood by the group, who knew that in that intensely dry heat the danger of exposure was lessened by active exercise and the profuse perspiration that followed it. In another moment the stranger had reached their side, dripping as if rained upon, mopping his damp curls and handsome bearded face with his linen coat, as he threw himself pantingly on the ground.

"I struck out over here first, boys, to give you a little warning," he said, as soon as he had gained breath. "That engineer will be down here to take charge as soon as the six o'clock stage comes in. He 's an oldish chap, has got a family of two daughters, and — I — am — d—d if he is not bringing them down here with him."

"Oh, go 'long!" exclaimed the five men in one voice, raising themselves on their hands and elbows, and glaring at the speaker.

"Fact, boys! Soon as I found it out I just waltzed into that Jew shop at the Crossing and bought up all the clothes that would be likely to suit you fellows, before anybody else got a show. I reckon I cleared out the shop. The duds are a little mixed in style, but I reckon they 're clean and whole, and a man might face a lady in 'em. I left them round at the old Buckeye Spring, where they 're handy without attracting attention. You boys can go there for a general wash-up, rig yourselves up without saying anything, and then meander back careless and easy

in your store clothes, just as the stage is coming in, sabe?"

"Why did n't you let us know earlier?" asked Mattingly aggrievedly; "you 've been back here at least an hour."

"I 've been getting some place ready for *them*," returned the newcomer. "We might have managed to put the man somewhere, if he 'd been alone, but these women want family accommodation. There was nothing left for me to do but to buy up Thompson's saloon."

"No?" interrupted his audience, half in incredulity, half in protestation.

"Fact! You boys will have to take your drinks under canvas again, I reckon! But I made Thompson let those gold-framed mirrors that used to stand behind the bar go into the bargain, and they sort of furnish the room. You know the saloon is one of them patent houses you can take to pieces, and I 've been reckoning you boys will have to pitch in and help me to take the whole shanty over to the laurel bushes, and put it up agin Kearney's cabin."

"What 's all that?" said the younger Kearney, with an odd mingling of astonishment and bashful gratification.

"Yes, I reckon yours is the cleanest house, because it 's the newest, so you 'll just step out and let us knock in one o' the gables, and clap it on to the saloon, and make *one* house of it, don't you see? There 'll be two rooms, one for the girls and the other for the old man."

The astonishment and bewilderment of the party had gradually given way to a boyish and impatient interest.

"Had n't we better do the job at once?" suggested Dick Mattingly.

"Or throw ourselves into those new clothes, so as to be ready," added the younger Kearney, looking down at his ragged trousers. "I say, Fairfax, what are the girls like, eh?"

All the others had been dying to ask the question, yet one and all laughed at the conscious manner and blushing cheek of the questioner.

"You 'll find out quick enough," returned Fairfax, whose curt carelessness did not, however, prevent a slight increase of color on his own cheek. "We 'd better get that job off our hands before doing anything else. So, if you 're ready, boys, we 'll just waltz down to Thompson's and pack up the shanty. He 's out of it by this time, I reckon. You might as well be perspiring to some purpose over there as gaspin' under this tree. We won't go back to work this afternoon, but knock off now, and call it half a day. Come! Hump yourselves, gentlemen. Are you ready? One, two, three, and away!"

In another instant the tree was deserted; the figures of the five millionaires of Devil's Ford, crossing the fierce glare of the open space, with boyish alacrity, glistened in the sunlight, and then disappeared in the nearest fringe of thickets.

[redacted]

CHAPTER II

Six hours later, when the shadow of Devil's Spur had crossed the river, and spread a slight coolness over the flat beyond, the Pioneer coach, leaving the summit, began also to bathe its heated bulk in the long shadows of the descent. Conspicuous among the dusty passengers, the two pretty and youthful faces of the daughters of Philip Carr, mining superintendent and engineer, loo[illegible]d from the windows with no little anxiety towards their future home in the straggling settlement below, that occasionally came in view at the turns of the long zigzagging road. A slight look of comical disappointment passed between them as they gazed upon the sterile flat, dotted with unsightly excrescences that stood eo[illegible]lly for cabins or mounds of stone and gravel. It [illegible] and inconsistent a culmination to the [illegible] they had passed through, so hopeless and in[illegible]sion to the preparation of that long pictures[illegible], with its glimpses of sylvan and pastoral glades [illegible] as the coach swept down the last incline, [illegible]less monotony of the dead level spread out [illegible]owed by ditches and indented by pits, under c[illegible]ing their cheeks from the impalpable dust [illegible] the plunging wheels, they buried their fac[illegible]kerchiefs, to hide a few half-hysterical tear[illegible]y, their father, completely absorbed in a practical, [illegible]tific, and approving contemplation of the topography and material resources of the scene of his future labors, had no time to notice their defection. It was not until the stage drew up before a rambling tene-

ment bearing the inscription, "Hotel and Stage Office," that he became fully aware of it.

"We can't stop *here*, papa," said Christie Carr decidedly, with a shake of her pretty head. "You can't expect that."

Mr. Carr looked up at the building; it was half grocery, half saloon. Whatever other accommodation it contained must have been hidden in the rear, as the flat roof above was almost level with the raftered ceiling of the shop.

"Certainly," he replied hurriedly; "we 'll see to that in a moment. I dare say it 's all right. I told Fairfax we were coming. Somebody ought to be here."

"But they 're not," said Jessie Carr indignantly; "and the few that were here scampered off like rabbits to their burrows as soon as they saw us get down."

It was true. The little group of loungers before the building had suddenly disappeared. There was the flash of a red shirt vanishing in an adjacent doorway; the fading apparition of a pair of high boots and blue overalls in another; the abrupt withdrawal of a curly blonde head from a sashless window over the way. Even the saloon was deserted, although a back door in the dim recess seemed to creak mysteriously. The stage-coach, with the other passengers, had already rattled away.

"I certainly think Fairfax understood that I" — began Mr. Carr.

He was interrupted by the pressure of Christie's fingers on his arm and a subdued exclamation from Jessie, who was staring down the street.

"What are they?" she whispered in her sister's ear. "Nigger minstrels, a circus, or what?"

The five millionaires of Devil's Ford had just turned the corner of the straggling street, and were approaching in single file. One glance was sufficient to show that they had already availed themselves of the new clothing bought

by Fairfax, had washed, and one or two had shaved. But the result was startling.

Through some fortunate coincidence in size, Dick Mattingly was the only one who had achieved an entire suit. But it was of funereal black cloth, and although relieved at one extremity by a pair of high riding-boots, in which his too short trousers were tucked, and at the other by a tall white hat, and cravat of aggressive yellow, the effect was depressing. In agreeable contrast, his brother, Maryland Joe, was attired in a thin fawn-colored summer overcoat, lightly worn open, so as to show the unstarched bosom of a white embroidered shirt, and a pair of nankeen trousers and pumps. The Kearney brothers had divided a suit between them, the elder wearing a tightly fitting, single-breasted blue frock coat and a pair of pink striped cotton trousers, while the younger candidly displayed the trousers of his brother's suit, as a harmonious change to a shining black alpaca coat and crimson neckerchief. Fairfax, who brought up the rear, had, with characteristic unselfishness, contented himself with a French workman's blue blouse and a pair of white duck trousers. Had they shown the least consciousness of their finery, or of its absurdity, they would have seemed despicable. But only one expression beamed on the five sunburnt and shining faces — a look of unaffected boyish gratification and unrestricted welcome.

They halted before Mr. Carr and his daughters, simultaneously removed their various and remarkable head coverings, and waited until Fairfax advanced and severally presented them. Jessie Carr's half-frightened smile took refuge in the trembling shadows of her dark lashes; Christie Carr stiffened slightly, and looked straight before her.

"We reckoned — that is — we intended to meet you and the young ladies at the grade," said Fairfax, reddening a little as he endeavored to conceal his too ready slang, "and save you from trapesing — from dragging yourselves up grade again to your house."

"Then there *is* a house?" said Jessie, with an alarmingly frank laugh of relief, that was, however, as frankly reflected in the boyishly appreciative eyes of the young men.

"Such as it is," responded Fairfax, with a shade of anxiety, as he glanced at the fresh and pretty costumes of the young women, and dubiously regarded the two Saratoga trunks resting hopelessly on the veranda. "I 'm afraid it is n't much, for what you 're accustomed to. But," he added more cheerfully, "it will do for a day or two, and perhaps you 'll give us the pleasure of showing you the way there now."

The procession was quickly formed. Mr. Carr, alive only to the actual business that had brought him there, at once took possession of Fairfax, and began to disclose his plans for the working of the mine, occasionally halting to look at the work already done in the ditches, and to examine the field of his future operations. Fairfax, not displeased at being thus relieved of a lighter attendance on Mr. Carr's daughters, nevertheless from time to time cast a paternal glance backwards upon their escorts, who had each seized a handle of the two trunks, and were carrying them in couples at the young ladies' side. The occupation did not offer much freedom for easy gallantry, but no sign of discomfiture or uneasiness was visible in the grateful faces of the young men. The necessity of changing hands at times with their burdens brought a corresponding change of cavalier at the lady's side, although it was observed that the younger Kearney, for the sake of continuing a conversation with Miss Jessie, kept his grasp of the handle nearest the young lady until his hand was nearly cut through, and his arm worn out by exhaustion.

"The only thing on wheels in the camp is a mule wagon, and the mules are packin' gravel from the river this afternoon," explained Dick Mattingly apologetically to Christie, "or we 'd have toted — I mean carried — you and your

baggage up to the shant — the — your house. Give us two weeks more, Miss Carr — only two weeks to wash up our work and realize — and we 'll give you a pair of 2.40 steppers and a skeleton buggy to meet you at the top of the hill and drive you over to the cabin. Perhaps you 'd prefer a regular carriage; some ladies do. And a nigger driver. But what 's the use of planning anything? Afore that time comes we 'll have run you up a house on the hill, and you shall pick out the spot. It would n't take long — unless you preferred brick. I suppose we could get brick over from La Grange, if you cared for it, but it would take longer. If you could put up for a time with something of stained glass and a mahogany veranda " —

In spite of her cold indignation, and the fact that she could understand only a part of Mattingly's speech, Christie comprehended enough to make her lift her clear eyes to the speaker, as she replied freezingly that she feared she would not trouble them long with her company.

"Oh, you 'll get over that," responded Mattingly, with an exasperating confidence that drove her nearly frantic, from the manifest kindliness of intent that made it impossible for her to resent it. "I felt that way myself at first. Things will look strange and unsociable for a while, until you get the hang of them. You 'll naturally stamp round and cuss a little " — he stopped in conscious consternation.

With ready tact, and before Christie could reply, Maryland Joe had put down the trunk and changed hands with his brother.

"You must n't mind Dick, or he 'll go off and kill himself with shame," he whispered laughingly in her ear. "He means all right, but he 's picked up so much slang here he 's about forgotten how to talk English, and it 's nigh on to four years since he 's met a young lady."

Christie did not reply. Yet the laughter of her sister in advance with the Kearney brothers seemed to make the

reserve with which she tried to crush further familiarity only ridiculous.

"Do you know many operas, Miss Carr?"

She looked at the boyish, interested, sunburnt face so near to her own, and hesitated. After all, why should she add to her other real disappointments by taking this absurd creature seriously?

"In what way?" she returned, with a half smile.

"To play. On the piano, of course. There is n't one nearer here than Sacramento; but I reckon we could get a small one by Thursday. You could n't do anything on a banjo?" he added doubtfully; "Kearney 's got one."

"I imagine it would be very difficult to carry a piano over those mountains," said Christie laughingly, to avoid the collateral of the banjo.

"We got a billiard-table over from Stockton," half bashfully interrupted Dick Mattingly, struggling from his end of the trunk to recover his composure, "and it had to be brought over in sections on the back of a mule, so I don't see why" — He stopped short again in confusion, at a sign from his brother, and then added, "I mean, of course, that a piano is a heap more delicate, and valuable, and all that sort of thing, but it 's worth trying for."

"Fairfax was always saying he 'd get one for himself, so I reckon it 's possible," said Joe.

"Does he play?" asked Christie.

"You bet," said Joe, quite forgetting himself in his enthusiasm. "He can snatch Mozart and Beethoven baldheaded."

In the embarrassing silence that followed this speech the fringe of pine wood nearest the flat was reached. Here there was a rude "clearing," and beneath an enormous pine stood the two recently joined tenements. There was no attempt to conceal the point of junction between Kearney's cabin and the newly transported saloon from the flat — no

architectural illusion of the palpable collusion of the two buildings, which seemed to be telescoped into each other. The front room or living-room occupied the whole of Kearney's cabin. It contained, in addition to the necessary articles for housekeeping, a "bunk" or berth for Mr. Carr, so as to leave the second building entirely to the occupation of his daughters as bedroom and boudoir.

There was a half-humorous, half-apologetic exhibition of the rude utensils of the living-room, and then the young men turned away as the two girls entered the open door of the second room. Neither Christie nor Jessie could for a moment understand the delicacy which kept these young men from accompanying them into the room they had but a few moments before decorated and arranged with their own hands, and it was not until they turned to thank their strange entertainers that they found that they were gone.

The arrangement of the second room was rude and bizarre, but not without a singular originality and even tastefulness of conception. What had been the counter or "bar" of the saloon, gorgeous in white and gold, now sawn in two and divided, was set up on opposite sides of the room as separate dressing-tables, decorated with huge bunches of azaleas, that hid the rough earthenware bowls, and gave each table the appearance of a vestal altar.

The huge gilt plate-glass mirror which had hung behind the bar still occupied one side of the room, but its length was artfully divided by an enormous rosette of red, white, and blue muslin — one of the surviving Fourth of July decorations of Thompson's saloon. On either side of the door two pathetic-looking, convent-like cots, covered with spotless sheeting, and heaped up in the middle, like a snow-covered grave, had attracted their attention. They were still staring at them when Mr. Carr anticipated their curiosity.

"I ought to tell you that the young men confided to me the fact that there was neither bed nor mattress to be had

on the Ford. They have filled some flour-sacks with clean dry moss from the woods, and put half a dozen blankets on the top, and they hope you can get along until the messenger who starts to-night for La Grange can bring some bedding over."

Jessie flew with mischievous delight to satisfy herself of the truth of this marvel. "It 's so, Christie," she said laughingly — "three flour-sacks apiece; but I 'm jealous: yours are all marked 'superfine,' and mine 'middlings.'"

Mr. Carr had remained uneasily watching Christie's shadowed face.

"What matters?" she said dryly. "The accommodation is all in keeping."

"It will be better in a day or two," he continued, casting a longing look towards the door — the first refuge of masculine weakness in an impending domestic emergency. "I 'll go and see what can be done," he said feebly, with a sidelong impulse towards the opening and freedom. "I 've got to see Fairfax again to-night anyway."

"One moment, father," said Christie wearily. "Did you know anything of this place and these — these people — before you came?"

"Certainly — of course I did," he returned, with the sudden testiness of disturbed abstraction. "What are you thinking of? I knew the geological strata and the — the report of Fairfax and his partners before I consented to take charge of the works. And I can tell you that there is a fortune here. I intend to make my own terms, and share in it."

"And not take a salary or some sum of money down?" said Christie, slowly removing her bonnet in the same resigned way.

"I am not a hired man, or a workman, Christie," said her father sharply. "You ought not to oblige me to remind you of that."

"But the hired men — the superintendent and his workmen — were the only ones who ever got anything out of your last experiment with Colonel Waters at La Grange, and — and we at least lived among civilized people there."

"These young men are not common people, Christie; even if they have forgotten the restraints of speech and manners, they 're gentlemen."

"Who are willing to live like — like negroes."

"You can make them what you please."

Christie raised her eyes. There was a certain cynical ring in her father's voice that was unlike his usual hesitating abstraction. It both puzzled and pained her.

"I mean," he said hastily, "that you have the same opportunity to direct the lives of these young men into more regular, disciplined channels that I have to regulate and correct their foolish waste of industry and material here. It would at least beguile the time for you."

Fortunately for Mr. Carr's escape and Christie's uneasiness, Jessie, who had been examining the details of the living-room, broke in upon this conversation.

"I 'm sure it will be as good as a perpetual picnic. George Kearney says we can have a cooking-stove under the tree outside at the back, and as there will be no rain for three months we can do the cooking there, and that will give us more room for — for the piano when it comes; and there 's an old squaw to do the cleaning and washing-up any day — and — and — it will be real fun."

She stopped breathlessly, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes — a charming picture of youth and trustfulness. Mr. Carr had seized the opportunity to escape.

"Really, now, Christie," said Jessie confidentially, when they were alone, and Christie had begun to unpack her trunk, and to mechanically put her things away, "they 're not so bad."

"Who?" asked Christie.

"Why, the Kearneys, and Mattinglys, and Fairfax, and the lot, provided you don't look at their clothes. And think of it! they told me — for they tell one *everything* in the most alarming way — that those clothes were bought to please *us*. A scramble of things bought at La Grange, without reference to size or style. And to hear these creatures talk, why, you 'd think they were Astors or Rothschilds. Think of that little one with the curls — I don't believe he 's over seventeen, for all his baby mustache — says he 's going to build an assembly hall for us to give a dance in next month; and apologizes the next breath to tell us that there is n't any milk to be had nearer than La Grange, and we must do without it, and use syrup in our tea to-morrow."

"And where is all this wealth?" said Christie, forcing herself to smile at her sister's animation.

"Under our very feet, my child, and all along the river. Why, what we thought was pure and simple mud is what they call 'gold-bearing cement.'"

"I suppose that is why they don't brush their boots and trousers, it 's so precious," returned Christie dryly. "And have they ever translated this precious dirt into actual coin?"

"Bless you, yes. Why, that dirty little gutter, you know, that ran along the side of the road and followed us down the hill all the way here, that cost them — let me see — yes, nearly sixty thousand dollars. And fancy! papa's just condemned it — says it won't do; and they 've got to build another."

An impatient sigh from Christie drew Jessie's attention to her troubled eyebrows.

"Don't worry about our disappointment, dear. It is n't so very great. I dare say we 'll be able to get along here in some way, until papa is rich again. You know they intend to make him share with them."

"It strikes me that he is sharing with them already," said Christie, glancing bitterly round the cabin; "sharing everything — ourselves, our lives, our tastes."

"Ye-e-s!" said Jessie, with vaguely hesitating assent. "Yes, even these:" she showed two dice in the palm of her little hand. "I found 'em in the drawer of our dressing-table."

"Throw them away," said Christie impatiently.

But Jessie's small fingers closed over the dice. "I 'll give them to the little Kearney. I dare say they were the poor boy's playthings."

The appearance of these relics of wild dissipation, however, had lifted Christie out of her sublime resignation. "For Heaven's sake, Jessie," she said, "look around and see if there is anything more!"

To make sure, they each began to scrimmage; the broken-spirited Christie exhibiting both alacrity and penetration in searching obscure corners. In the dining-room, behind the dresser, three or four books were discovered: an odd volume of Thackeray, another of Dickens, a memorandum-book or diary. "This seems to be Latin," said Jessie, fishing out a smaller book. "I can't read it."

"It 's just as well you should n't," said Christie shortly, whose ideas of a general classical impropriety had been gathered from the pages of Lemprière's dictionary. "Put it back directly."

Jessie returned certain odes of one Horatius Flaccus to the corner, and uttered an exclamation. "Oh, Christie! here are some letters tied up with a ribbon."

They were two or three prettily written letters, exhaling a faint odor of refinement and of the pressed flowers that peeped from between the loose leaves. "I see, 'My darling Fairfax.' It 's from some woman."

"I don't think much of her, whosoever she is," said Christie, tossing the intact packet back into the corner.

"Nor I," echoed Jessie.

Nevertheless, by some feminine inconsistency, evidently the circumstance did make them think more of *him*, for a minute later, when they had reëntered their own room, Christie remarked, "The idea of petting a man by his family name! Think of mamma ever having called papa 'darling Carr'!"

"Oh, but his family name is n't Fairfax," said Jessie hastily; "that 's his *first* name, his Christian name. I forget what 's his other name, but nobody ever calls him by it."

"Do you mean," said Christie, with glistening eyes and awful deliberation — "do you mean to say that we 're expected to fall in with this insufferable familiarity? I suppose they 'll be calling *us* by our Christian names next."

"Oh, but they do!" said Jessie mischievously.

"What!"

"They call me Miss Jessie; and Kearney, the little one, asked me if Christie played."

"And what did you say?"

"I said that you did," answered Jessie, with an affectation of cherubic simplicity. "You do, dear; don't you? . . . There, don't get angry, darling; I could n't flare up all of a sudden in the face of that poor little creature; he looked so absurd — and so — so honest."

Christie turned away, relapsing into her old resigned manner, and assuming her household duties in a quiet, temporizing way that was, however, without hope or expectation.

Mr. Carr, who had dined with his friends under the excuse of not adding to the awkwardness of the first day's housekeeping, returned late at night with a mass of papers and drawings, into which he afterwards withdrew, but not until he had delivered himself of a mysterious package

intrusted to him by the young men for his daughters. It contained a contribution to their board in the shape of a silver spoon and battered silver mug, which Jessie chose to facetiously consider as an affecting reminiscence of the youthful Kearney's christening days — which it probably was.

The young girls retired early to their white snow-drifts: Jessie not without some hilarious struggles with hers, in which she was, however, quickly surprised by the deep and refreshing sleep of youth; Christie to lie awake and listen to the night wind, that had changed from the first cool whispers of sunset to the sturdy breath of the mountain. At times the frail house shook and trembled. Wandering gusts laden with the deep resinous odors of the wood found their way through the imperfect jointure of the two cabins, swept her cheek and even stirred her long, wide-open lashes. A broken spray of pine needles rustled along the roof, or a pine cone dropped with a quick reverberating tap-tap that for an instant startled her. Lying thus, wide awake, she fell into a dreamy reminiscence of the past, hearing snatches of old melody in the moving pines, fragments of sentences, old words, and familiar epithets in the murmuring wind at her ear, and even the faint breath of long-forgotten kisses on her cheek. She remembered her mother — a pallid creature, who had slowly faded out of one of her father's vague speculations in a vaguer speculation of her own, beyond his ken — whose place she had promised to take at her father's side. The words, "Watch over him, Christie; he needs a woman's care," again echoed in her ears, as if borne on the night wind from the lonely grave in the lonelier cemetery by the distant sea. She had devoted herself to him with some little sacrifices of self, only remembered now for their uselessness in saving her father the disappointment that sprang from his sanguine and one-idea'd temperament. She thought

of him lying asleep in the other room, ready on the morrow to devote those fateful qualities to the new enterprise, that with equally fateful disposition she believed would end in failure. It did not occur to her that the doubts of her own practical nature were almost as dangerous and illogical as his enthusiasm, and that for that reason she was fast losing what little influence she possessed over him. With the example of her mother's weakness before her eyes, she had become an unsparing and distrustful critic, with the sole effect of awakening his distrust and withdrawing his confidence from her. He was beginning to deceive her as he had never deceived her mother. Even Jessie knew more of this last enterprise than she did herself.

All that did not tend to decrease her utter restlessness. It was already past midnight when she noticed that the wind had again abated. The mountain breeze had by this time possessed the stifling valleys and heated bars of the river in its strong, cold embraces; the equilibrium of nature was restored, and a shadowy mist rose from the hollow. A stillness, more oppressive and intolerable than the previous commotion, began to pervade the house and the surrounding woods. She could hear the regular breathing of the sleepers; she even fancied she could detect the faint pulses of the more distant life in the settlement. The far-off barking of a dog, a lost shout, the indistinct murmur of some nearer watercourse — mere phantoms of sound — made the silence more irritating. With a sudden resolution she arose, dressed herself quietly and completely, threw a heavy cloak over her head and shoulders, and opened the door between the living-room and her own. Her father was sleeping soundly in his bunk in the corner. She passed noiselessly through the room, opened the lightly fastened door, and stepped out into the night.

In the irritation and disgust of her walk hither, she had never noticed the situation of the cabin, as it nestled on

the slope at the fringe of the woods; in the preoccupation of her disappointment and the mechanical putting away of her things, she had never looked once from the window of her room, or glanced backward out of the door that she had entered. The view before her was a revelation — a reproach, a surprise that took away her breath. Over her shoulders the newly risen moon poured a flood of silvery light, stretching from her feet across the shining bars of the river to the opposite bank, and on up to the very crest of the Devil's Spur — no longer a huge bulk of crushing shadow, but the steady exaltation of plateau, spur, and terrace clothed with replete and unutterable beauty. In this magical light that beauty seemed to be sustained and carried along by the river winding at its base, lifted again to the broad shoulder of the mountain, and lost only in the distant vista of deathlike, overcrowning snow. Behind and above where she stood the towering woods seemed to be waiting with opened ranks to absorb her with the little cabin she had quitted, dwarfed into insignificance in the vast prospect; but nowhere was there another sign or indication of human life and habitation. She looked in vain for the settlement, for the rugged ditches, the scattered cabins, and the unsightly heaps of gravel. In the glamour of the moonlight they had vanished; a veil of silver-gray vapor touched here and there with ebony shadows masked its site. A black strip beyond was the river bank. All else was changed. With a sudden sense of awe and loneliness she turned to the cabin and its sleeping inmates — all that seemed left to her in the vast and stupendous domination of rock and wood and sky.

But in another moment the loneliness passed. A new and delicious sense of an infinite hospitality and friendliness in their silent presence began to possess her. This same slighted, forgotten, uncomprehended, but still foolish and forgiving Nature seemed to be bending over her

frightened and listening ear with vague but thrilling murmurings of freedom and independence. She felt her heart expand with its wholesome breath, her soul fill with its sustaining truth. She felt —

What was that?

An unmistakable outburst of a drunken song at the foot of the slope: —

> "Oh, my name it is Johnny from Pike,
> I'm h—ll on a spree or a strike." . . .

She stopped as crimson with shame and indignation as if the viewless singer had risen before her.

> "I knew when to bet, and get up and get!"

"Hush! D—n it all. Don't you hear?"

There was the sound of hurried whispers, a "No" and "Yes," and then a dead silence.

Christie crept nearer to the edge of the slope in the shadow of a buckeye. In the clearer view she could distinguish a staggering figure in the trail below who had evidently been stopped by two other expostulating shadows that were approaching from the shelter of a tree.

"Sho! — did n't know!"

The staggering figure endeavored to straighten itself, and then slouched away in the direction of the settlement. The two mysterious shadows retreated again to the tree, and were lost in its deeper shadow. Christie darted back to the cabin, and softly reëntered her room.

"I thought I heard a noise that woke me, and I missed you," said Jessie, rubbing her eyes. "Did you see anything?"

"No," said Christie, beginning to undress.

"You were n't frightened, dear?"

"Not in the least," said Christie, with a strange little laugh. "Go to sleep."

CHAPTER III

THE five impulsive millionaires of Devil's Ford fulfilled not a few of their most extravagant promises. In less than six weeks Mr. Carr and his daughters were installed in a new house, built near the site of the double cabin, which was again transferred to the settlement, in order to give greater seclusion to the fair guests. It was a long, roomy, one-storied villa, with a not unpicturesque combination of deep veranda and trelliswork, which relieved the flat monotony of the interior and the barrenness of the freshly cleared ground. An upright piano, brought from Sacramento, occupied the corner of the parlor. A suite of gorgeous furniture, whose pronounced and extravagant glories the young girls instinctively hid under home-made linen covers, had also been spoils from afar. Elsewhere the house was filled with ornaments and decorations that in their incongruity forcibly recalled the gilded plate-glass mirrors of the bedroom in the old cabin. In the hasty furnishing of this Aladdin's palace, the slaves of the ring had evidently seized upon anything that would add to its glory, without reference always to fitness.

"I wish it did n't look so cussedly like a robber's cave," said George Kearney, when they were taking a quiet preliminary survey of the unclassified treasures, before the Carrs took possession.

"Or a gambling hell," said his brother reflectively.

"It 's about the same thing, I reckon," said Dick Mattingly, who was supposed, in his fiery youth, to have encountered the similarity.

Nevertheless, the two girls managed to bestow the heterogeneous collection with tasteful adaptation to their needs. A crystal chandelier, which had once lent a fascinating illusion to the game of monte, hung unlighted in the broad hall, where a few other bizarre and public articles were relegated. A long red sofa or bench, which had done duty beside a billiard-table, found a place here also. Indeed, it is to be feared that some of the more rustic and bashful youths of Devil's Ford, who had felt it incumbent upon them to pay their respects to the newcomers, were more at ease in this vestibule than in the arcana beyond, whose glories they could see through the open door. To others, it represented a recognized state of probation before their *re-entrée* into civilization again. "I reckon, if you don't mind, miss," said the spokesman of one party, "ez this is our first call, we 'll sorter hang out in the hall yer, until you 're used to us." On another occasion, one Whiskey Dick, impelled by a sense of duty, paid a visit to the new house and its fair occupants, in a fashion frankly recounted by him afterwards at the bar of the Tecumseh Saloon.

"You see, boys, I dropped in there the other night, when some of you fellows was doin' the high-toned 'thank'e, marm' business in the parlor. I just came to anchor in the corner of the sofy in the hall, without lettin' on to say that I was there, and took up a Webster's Dictionary that was on the table and laid it open — keerless like, on my knees, ez if I was sorter consultin' it — and kinder dozed off there, listenin' to you fellows gassin' with the young ladies, and that yer Miss Christie just snakin' music outer that pianner, and I reckon I fell asleep. Anyhow, I was there nigh on to two hours. It 's mighty soothin', them fashionable calls; sorter knocks the old camp dust outer a fellow, and sets him up again."

It would have been well if the new life of the Devil's Ford had shown no other irregularity than the harmless

eccentricities of its original locators. But the news of its sudden fortune, magnified by report, began presently to flood the settlement with another class of adventurers. A tide of waifs, strays, and malcontents of old camps along the river began to set towards Devil's Ford, in very much the same fashion as the débris, drift, and alluvium had been carried down in bygone days and cast upon its banks. A few immigrant wagons, diverted from the highways of travel by the fame of the new diggings, halted upon the slopes of Devil's Spur and on the arid flats of the Ford, and disgorged their sallow freight of alkali-poisoned, prematurely aged women and children and maimed and fever-stricken men. Against this rude form of domesticity were opposed the chromo-tinted dresses and extravagant complexions of a few single unattended women — happily seen more often at night and behind gilded bars than in the garish light of day — and an equal number of pale-faced, dark-mustached, well-dressed, and suspiciously idle men. A dozen rivals of Thompson's saloon had sprung up along the narrow main street. There were two new hotels — one a "Temperance House," whose ascetic quality was confined only to the abnegation of whiskey — a rival stage office, and a small one-storied building, from which the "Sierran Banner" fluttered weekly, for "ten dollars a year, in advance." Insufferable in the glare of a Sabbath sun, bleak, windy, and flaring in the gloom of a Sabbath night, and hopelessly depressing on all days of the week, the First Presbyterian Church lifted its blunt steeple from the barrenest area of the flats, and was hideous! The civic improvements so enthusiastically contemplated by the five millionaires in the earlier pages of this veracious chronicle — the fountain, reservoir, town-hall, and free library — had not yet been erected. Their sites had been anticipated by more urgent buildings and mining works, unfortunately not considered in the sanguine dreams of the enthusiasts, and,

more significant still, their cost and expense had been also anticipated by the enormous outlay of their earnings in the work upon Devil's Ditch.

Nevertheless, the liberal fulfillment of their promise in the new house in the suburbs blinded the young girls' eyes to their shortcomings in the town. Their own remoteness and elevation above its feverish life kept them from the knowledge of much that was strange, and perhaps disturbing to their equanimity. As they did not mix with the immigrant women — Miss Jessie's good-natured intrusion into one of their half-nomadic camps one day having been met with rudeness and suspicion — they gradually fell into the way of trusting the responsibility of new acquaintances to the hands of their original hosts, and of consulting them in the matter of local recreation. It thus occurred that one day the two girls, on their way to the main street for an hour's shopping at the Ville de Paris and Variety Store, were stopped by Dick Mattingly a few yards from their house with the remark that, as the county election was then in progress, it would be advisable for them to defer their intention for a few hours. As he did not deem it necessary to add that two citizens, in the exercise of a freeman's franchise, had been supplementing their ballots with bullets, in front of an admiring crowd, they knew nothing of the accident that removed from Devil's Ford an entertaining stranger, who had only the night before partaken of their hospitality.

A week or two later, returning one morning from a stroll in the forest, Christie and Jessie were waylaid by George Kearney and Fairfax, and, under pretext of being shown a new and romantic trail, were diverted from the regular path. This enabled Mattingly and Maryland Joe to cut down the body of a man hanged by the Vigilance Committee a few hours before on the regular trail, and to remonstrate with the committee on the incompatibility of such exhibitions with a maidenly worship of nature.

"With the whole county to hang a man in," expostulated Joe, "you might keep clear of Carr's woods."

It is needless to add that the young girls never knew of this act of violence, or the delicacy that kept them in ignorance of it. Mr. Carr was too absorbed in business to give heed to what he looked upon as a convulsion of society as natural as a geological upheaval, and too prudent to provoke the criticism of his daughters by comment in their presence.

An equally unexpected confidence, however, took its place. Mr. Carr having finished his coffee one morning, lingered a moment over his perfunctory paternal embraces, with the awkwardness of a preoccupied man endeavoring by the assumption of a lighter interest to veil another abstraction.

"And what are we doing to-day, Christie?" he asked, as Jessie left the dining-room.

"Oh, pretty much the usual thing — nothing in particular. If George Kearney gets the horses from the summit, we 're going to ride over to Indian Spring to picnic. Fairfax — Mr. Munroe — I always forget that man's real name in this dreadfully familiar country — well, he 's coming to escort us, and take me, I suppose — that is, if Kearney takes Jessie."

"A very nice arrangement," returned her father, with a slight nervous contraction of the corners of his mouth and eyelids to indicate mischievousness. "I 've no doubt they 'll both be here. You know they usually are — ha! ha! And what about the two Mattinglys and Philip Kearney, eh?" he continued; "won't they be jealous?"

"It is n't their turn," said Christie carelessly; "besides, they 'll probably be there."

"And I suppose they 're beginning to be resigned," said Carr, smiling.

"What on earth are you talking of, father?"

She turned her clear brown eyes upon him, and was re-

garding him with such manifest unconsciousness of the drift of his speech, and, withal, a little vague impatience of his archness, that Mr. Carr was feebly alarmed. It had the effect of banishing his assumed playfulness, which made his serious explanation the more irritating.

"Well, I rather thought that — that young Kearney was paying considerable attention to — to — to Jessie," replied her father, with hesitating gravity.

"What! that boy?"

"Young Kearney is one of the original locators, and an equal partner in the mine. A very enterprising young fellow. In fact, much more advanced and bolder in his conceptions than the others. I find no difficulty with him."

At another time Christie would have questioned the convincing quality of this proof, but she was too much shocked at her father's first suggestion to think of anything else.

"You don't mean to say, father, that you are talking seriously of these men — your friends — whom we see every day — and our only company?"

"No, no!" said Mr. Carr hastily; "you misunderstand. I don't suppose that Jessie or you" —

"Or *me!* Am *I* included?"

"You don't let me speak, Christie. I mean, I am not talking seriously," continued Mr. Carr, with his most serious aspect, "of you and Jessie in this matter; but it may be a serious thing to these young men to be thrown continually in the company of two attractive girls."

"I understand — you mean that we should not see so much of them," said Christie, with a frank expression of relief so genuine as to utterly discompose her father. "Perhaps you are right, though I fail to discover anything serious in the attentions of young Kearney to Jessie — or — whoever it may be — to me. But it will be very easy to remedy it, and see less of them. Indeed, we might begin to-day with some excuse."

"Yes — certainly. Of course!" said Mr. Carr, fully convinced of his utter failure, but, like most weak creatures, consoling himself with the reflection that he had not shown his hand or committed himself. "Yes; but it would perhaps be just as well for the present to let things go on as they were. We 'll talk of it again — I 'm in a hurry now," and edging himself through the door, he slipped away.

"What do you think is father's last idea?" said Christie, with, I fear, a slight lack of reverence in her tone, as her sister reëntered the room. "He thinks George Kearney is paying you too much attention."

"No!" said Jessie, replying to her sister's half-interrogative, half-amused glance with a frank, unconscious smile.

"Yes, and he says that Fairfax — I think it 's Fairfax — is equally fascinated with *me*."

Jessie's brow slightly contracted as she looked curiously at her sister.

"Of all things," she said, "I wonder if any one has put that idea into his dear old head. He could n't have thought it himself."

"I don't know," said Christie musingly; "but perhaps it 's just as well if we kept a little more to ourselves for a while."

"Did father say so?" said Jessie quickly.

"No, but that is evidently what he meant."

"Ye-es," said Jessie slowly, "unless" —

"Unless what?" said Christie sharply. "Jessie, you don't for a moment mean to say that you could possibly conceive of anything else?"

"I mean to say," said Jessie, stealing her arm around her sister's waist demurely, "that you are perfectly right. We 'll keep away from these fascinating Devil's Forders, and particularly the youngest Kearney. I believe there has been some ill-natured gossip. I remember that the

other day, when we passed the shanty of that Pike County family on the slope, there were three women at the door, and one of them said something that made poor little Kearney turn white and pink alternately, and dance with suppressed rage. I suppose the old lady — M'Corkle, that 's her name — would like to have a share of our cavaliers for her Euphemy and Mamie. I dare say it's only right; I would lend them the cherub occasionally, and you might let them have Mr. Munroe twice a week."

She laughed, but her eyes sought her sister's with a certain watchfulness of expression.

Christie shrugged her shoulders, with a suggestion of disgust.

"Don't joke. We ought to have thought of all this before."

"But when we first knew them, in the dear old cabin, there was n't any other woman and nobody to gossip, and that 's what made it so nice. I don't think so very much of civilization, do you?" said the young lady pertly.

Christie did not reply. Perhaps she was thinking the same thing. It certainly had been very pleasant to enjoy the spontaneous and chivalrous homage of these men, with no further suggestion of recompense or responsibility than the permission to be worshiped; but beyond that she racked her brain in vain to recall any look or act that proclaimed the lover. These men, whom she had found so relapsed into barbarism that they had forgotten the most ordinary forms of civilization; these men, even in whose extravagant admiration there was a certain loss of self-respect, that as a woman she would never forgive; these men, who seemed to belong to another race — impossible! Yet it was so.

"What construction must they have put upon her father's acceptance of their presents — of their company — of her freedom in their presence? No! they must have

understood from the beginning that she and her sister had never looked upon them except as transient hosts and chance acquaintances. Any other idea was preposterous. And yet" —

It was the recurrence of this "yet" that alarmed her. For she remembered now that but for their slavish devotion they might claim to be her equal. According to her father's account, they had come from homes as good as their own; they were certainly more than her equal in fortune; and her father had come to them as an employee, until they had taken him into partnership. If there had only been sentiment of any kind connected with any of them! But they were all alike, brave, unselfish, humorous — and often ridiculous. If anything, Dick Mattingly was funniest by nature, and made her laugh more. Maryland Joe, his brother, told better stories (sometimes of Dick), though not so good a mimic as the other Kearney, who had a fairly sympathetic voice in singing. They were all good looking enough; perhaps they set store on that — men are so vain!

And as for her own rejected suitor, Fairfax Munroe, except for a kind of grave and proper motherliness about his protecting manner, he absolutely was the most indistinctive of them all. He had once brought her some rare tea from the Chinese camp, and had taught her how to make it; he had cautioned her against sitting under the trees at nightfall; he had once taken off his coat to wrap around her. Really, if this were the only evidence of devotion that could be shown, she was safe!

"Well," said Jessie, "it amuses you, I see."

Christie checked the smile that had been dimpling the cheek nearest Jessie, and turned upon her the face of an elder sister.

"Tell me, have *you* noticed this extraordinary attention of Mr. Munroe to me?"

"Candidly?" asked Jessie, seating herself comfortably

on the table sideways, and endeavoring to pull her skirt over her little feet. "Honest Injun?"

"Don't be idiotic, and, above all, don't be slangy! Of course, candidly."

"Well, no. I can't say that I have."

"Then," said Christie, "why in the name of all that 's preposterous, do they persist in pairing me off with the least interesting man of the lot?"

Jessie leaped from the table.

"Come now," she said, with a little nervous laugh, "he 's not so bad as all that. You don't know him. But what does it matter now, as long as we 're not going to see them any more?"

"They 're coming here for the ride to-day," said Christie resignedly. "Father thought it better not to break it off at once."

"Father thought so!" echoed Jessie, stopping, with her hand on the door.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

But Jessie had already left the room, and was singing in the hall.

CHAPTER IV

THE afternoon did not, however, bring their expected visitors. It brought, instead, a brief note by the hands of Whiskey Dick from Fairfax, apologizing for some business that kept him and George Kearney from accompanying the ladies. It added that the horses were at the disposal of themselves and any escort they might select, if they would kindly give the message to Whiskey Dick.

The two girls looked at each other awkwardly; Jessie did not attempt to conceal a slight pout.

"It looks as if they were anticipating us," she said, with a half-forced smile. "I wonder, now, if there really has been any gossip? But no! They would n't have stopped for that, unless" — She looked curiously at her sister.

"Unless what?" repeated Christie; "you are horribly mysterious this morning."

"Am I? It 's nothing. But they 're wanting an answer. Of course you 'll decline."

"And intimate we only care for their company! No! We 'll say we 're sorry they can't come, and — accept their horses. We can do without an escort, we two."

"Capital!" said Jessie, clapping her hands. "We 'll show them" —

"We 'll show them nothing," interrupted Christie decidedly. "In our place there 's only the one thing to do. Where is this — Whiskey Dick?"

"In the parlor."

"The parlor!" echoed Christie. "Whiskey Dick? What — is he" —

"Yes; he 's all right," said Jessie confidently. "He 's been here before, but he stayed in the hall; he was so shy. I don't think you saw him."

"I should think not — Whiskey Dick!"

"Oh, you can call him Mr. Hall, if you like," said Jessie, laughing. "His real name is Dick Hall. If you want to be funny, you can say Alky Hall, as the others do."

Christie's only reply to this levity was a look of superior resignation as she crossed the hall and entered the parlor.

Then ensued one of those surprising, mystifying, and utterly inexplicable changes that leave the masculine being so helpless in the hands of his feminine master. Before Christie opened the door her face underwent a rapid transformation: the gentle glow of a refined woman's welcome suddenly beamed in her interested eyes; the impulsive courtesy of an expectant hostess eagerly seizing a long-looked-for opportunity broke in a smile upon her lips as she swept across the room, and stopped with her two white outstretched hands before Whiskey Dick.

It needed only the extravagant contrast presented by that gentleman to complete the tableau. Attired in a suit of shining black alpaca, the visitor had evidently prepared himself with some care for a possible interview. He was seated by the French window opening upon the veranda, as if to secure a retreat in case of an emergency. Scrupulously washed and shaven, some of the soap appeared to have lingered in his eyes and inflamed the lids, even while it lent a sleek and shining lustre, not unlike his coat, to his smooth black hair. Nevertheless, leaning back in his chair, he had allowed a large white handkerchief to depend gracefully from his fingers — a pose at once suggesting easy and elegant languor.

"How kind of you to give me an opportunity to make

up for my misfortune when you last called! I was so sorry to have missed you. But it was entirely my fault! You were hurried, I think — you conversed with others in the hall — you " —

She stopped to assist him to pick up the handkerchief that had fallen, and the Panama hat that had rolled from his lap towards the window when he had started suddenly to his feet at the apparition of grace and beauty. As he still nervously retained the two hands he had grasped, this would have been a difficult feat, even had he not endeavored at the same moment, by a backward furtive kick, to propel the hat out of the window, at which she laughingly broke from his grasp and flew to the rescue.

"Don't mind it, miss," he said hurriedly. "It is not worth your demeaning yourself to touch it. Leave it outside thar, miss. I would n't have toted it in, anyhow, if some of those highfalutin' fellows had n't allowed, the other night, ez it were the reg'lar thing to do; as if, miss, any gentleman kalkilated to ever put on his hat in the house afore a lady!"

But Christie had already possessed herself of the unlucky object, and had placed it upon the table. This compelled Whiskey Dick to rise again, and as an act of careless good breeding to drop his handkerchief in it. He then leaned one elbow upon the piano, and crossing one foot over the other, remained standing in an attitude he remembered to have seen in the pages of an illustrated paper as portraying the hero in some drawing-room scene. It was easy and effective, but seemed to be more favorable to reverie than conversation. Indeed, he remembered that he had forgotten to consult the letterpress as to which it represented.

"I see you agree with me, that politeness is quite a matter of intention," said Christie, "and not of mere fashion and rules. Now, for instance," she continued, with a dazzling smile, "I suppose, according to the rules, I ought

to give you a note to Mr. Munroe, accepting his offer. That is all that is required; but it seems so much nicer — don't you think? — to tell it to *you* for *him*, and have the pleasure of your company and a little chat at the same time."

"That 's it, that 's just it, Miss Carr; you 've hit it in the centre this time," said Whiskey Dick, now quite convinced that his attitude was not intended for eloquence, and shifting back to his own seat, hat and all; "that 's tantamount to what I said to the boys just now. 'You want an excuse,' sez I, 'for not goin' out with the young ladies. So, accorden' to rules, you writes a letter allowin' buzziness and that sorter thing detains you. But wot 's the facts? You 're a gentleman, and as gentlemen you and George comes to the opinion that you 're rather playin' it for all it 's worth in this yer house, you know — comin' here night and day, off and on, reg'lar sociable and fam'ly like, and makin' people talk about things they ain't any call to talk about, and, what 's a darned sight more, *you fellows* ain't got any right *yet* to allow 'em to talk about, d' ye see?'" He paused, out of breath.

It was Miss Christie's turn to move about. In changing her seat to the piano-stool, so as to be nearer her visitor, she brushed down some loose music, which Whiskey Dick hastened to pick up.

"Pray don't mind it," she said, "pray don't, really — let it be" — But Whiskey Dick, feeling himself on safe ground in this attention, persisted to the bitter end of a disintegrated and well-worn "Trovatore." "So that is what Mr. Munroe said," she remarked quietly.

"Not just then, in course, but it 's what 's bin on his mind and in his talk for days off and on," returned Dick, with a knowing smile and a nod of mysterious confidence. "Bless your soul, Miss Carr, folks like you and me don't need to have them things explained. That 's what I said

to him, sez I. 'Don't send no note, but just go up there and hev it out fair and square, and say what you do mean.' But they would hev the note, and I kalkilated to bring it. But when I set my eyes on you, and heard you express yourself as you did just now, I sez to myself, sez I, 'Dick, yer 's a young lady, and a fash'nable lady at that, ez don't go foolin' round on rules and etiketts' — excuse my freedom, Miss Carr — 'and you and her,' sez I, 'kin just discuss this yer matter in a sociable, off-hand, fash'nable way.' They 're a good lot o' boys, Miss Carr, a square lot — white men all of 'em; but they 're a little soft and green, maybe, from livin' in these yer pine woods along o' the other sap. They just worship the ground you and your sister tread on — certain! of course! of course!" he added hurriedly, recognizing Christie's half-conscious, deprecating gesture with more exaggerated deprecation. "I understand. But what I wanter say is that they 'd be willin' to be that ground, and lie down and let you walk over them — so to speak, Miss Carr, so to speak — if it would keep the hem of your gown from gettin' soiled in the mud o' the camp. But it would n't do for them to make a reg'lar curderoy road o' themselves for the huol camp to trapse over, on the mere chance of your some time passin' that way, would it now?"

"Won't you let me offer you some refreshment, Mr. Hall?" said Christie, rising, with a slight color. "I 'm really ashamed of my forgetfulness again, but I 'm afraid it 's partly *your* fault for entertaining me to the exclusion of yourself. No, thank you, let me fetch it for you."

She turned to a handsome sideboard near the door, and presently faced him again with a decanter of whiskey and a glass in her hand, and a return of the bewitching smile she had worn on entering.

"But perhaps you don't take whiskey?" suggested the

arch deceiver, with a sudden affected but pretty perplexity of eye, brow, and lips.

For the first time in his life Whiskey Dick hesitated between two forms of intoxication. But he was still nervous and uneasy; habit triumphed, and he took the whiskey. He, however, wiped his lips with a slight wave of his handkerchief, to support a certain easy elegance which he firmly believed relieved the act of any vulgar quality.

"Yes, ma'am," he continued, after an exhilarated pause. "Ez I said afore, this yer 's a matter you and me kin discuss after the fashion o' society. My idea is that these yer boys should kinder let up on you and Miss Jessie for a while, and do a little more permiskus attention round the Ford. There 's one or two families yer with grown-up gals ez oughter be squared; that is — the boys mighter put in a few fancy touches among them — kinder take 'em buggy riding — or to church — once in a while — just to take the pizen outer their tongues, and make a kind o' bluff to the parents, d' ye see? That would sorter divert their own minds; and even if it did n't, it would kinder get 'em accustomed agin to the old style and their own kind. I want to warn ye agin an idea that might occur to you in a giniral way. I don't say you hev the idea, but it 's kind o' nat'ral you might be thinkin' of it some time, and I thought I 'd warn you agin it."

"I think we understand each other too well to differ much, Mr. Hall," said Christie, still smiling; "but what is the idea?"

The delicate compliment to their confidential relations and the slight stimulus of liquor had tremulously exalted Whiskey Dick. Affecting to look cautiously out of the window and around the room, he ventured to draw nearer the young woman with a half-paternal, half-timid familiarity.

"It might have occurred to you," he said, laying his hand lightly, holding his handkerchief as if to veil mere vulgar contact, on Christie's shoulder, "that it would be a good thing on *your* side to invite down some of your high-toned gentlemen friends from 'Frisco to visit you and escort you round. It seems quite nat'ral like, and I don't say it ain't, but — the boys would n't stand it."

In spite of her self-possession Christie's eyes suddenly darkened, and she involuntarily drew herself up. But Whiskey Dick, guiltily attributing the movement to his own indiscreet gesture, said, "Excuse me, miss," recovered himself by lightly dusting her shoulder with his handkerchief, as if to remove the impression, and her smile returned.

"They would n't stand it," said Dick, "and there 'd be some shooting! Not afore you, miss — not afore you, in course! But they 'd adjourn to the woods some morning with them city folks, and hev it out with rifles at a hundred yards. Or, seein' ez they 're city folks, the boys would do the square thing with pistols at twelve paces. They 're good boys, as I said afore; but they 're quick and tetchy — George, being the youngest, nat'rally is the tetchiest. You know how it is, Miss Carr; his pretty, gal-like face and little mustaches haz cost him half a dozen scrimmages already. He 'z had a fight for every hair that 's growed in his mustache since he kem here."

"Say no more, Mr. Hall!" said Christie, rising and pressing her hands lightly on Dick's tremulous fingers. "If I ever had any such idea, I should abandon it now; you are quite right in this as in your other opinions. I shall never cease to be thankful to Mr. Munroe and Mr. Kearney that they intrusted this delicate matter to your hands."

"Well," said the gratified and reddening visitor, "it ain't perhaps the square thing to them or myself to say

that they reckoned to have me discuss their delicate affairs for them, but" —

"I understand," interrupted Christie. "They simply gave you the letter as a friend. It was my good fortune to find you a sympathizing and liberal man of the world." The delighted Dick, with conscious vanity beaming from every feature of his shining face, lightly waved the compliment aside with his handkerchief, as she continued, "But I am forgetting the message. We accept the horses. Of course we *could* do without an escort; but, forgive my speaking so frankly, are *you* engaged this afternoon?"

"Excuse me, miss, I don't take" — stammered Dick, scarcely believing his ears.

"Could you give us your company as an escort?" repeated Christie, with a smile.

Was he awake or dreaming, or was this some trick of liquor in his often distorted fancy? He, Whiskey Dick! the butt of his friends, the chartered oracle of the bar-rooms, even in whose wretched vanity there was always the haunting suspicion that he was despised and scorned; he, who had dared so much in speech, and achieved so little in fact! he, whose habitual weakness had even led him into the wildest indiscretion here; he — now offered a reward for that indiscretion! He, Whiskey Dick, the solicited escort of these two beautiful and peerless girls! What would they say at the Ford? What would his friends think? It would be all over the Ford the next day. His past would be vindicated, his future secured. He grew erect at the thought. It was almost in other voice, and with no trace of his previous exaggeration, that he said, "With pleasure."

"Then, if you will bring the horses at once, we shall be ready when you return."

In another instant he had vanished, as if afraid to trust the reality of his good fortune to the dangers of delay.

At the end of half an hour he reappeared, leading the two horses, himself mounted on a half-broken mustang. A pair of large, jingling silver spurs and a stiff sombrero, borrowed with the mustang from some mysterious source, were donned to do honor to the occasion.

The young girls were not yet ready, but he was shown by the Chinese servant into the parlor to wait for them. The decanter of whiskey and glasses were still invitingly there. He was hot, trembling, and flushed with triumph. He walked to the table and laid his hand on the decanter, when an odd thought flashed upon him. He would not drink this time. No, it should not be said that he, the selected escort of the élite of Devil's Ford, had to fill himself up with whiskey before they started. The boys might turn to each other in their astonishment, as he proudly passed with his fair companions, and say, "It 's Whiskey Dick," but he 'd be d—d if they should add, "and full as ever." No, sir! Nor when he was riding beside these real ladies, and leaning over them at some confidential moment, should they even know it from his breath! No. . . . Yet a thimbleful, taken straight, only a thimbleful, would n't be much, and might help to pull him together. He again reached his trembling hand for the decanter, hesitated, and then, turning his back upon it, resolutely walked to the open window. Almost at the same instant he found himself face to face with Christie on the veranda.

She looked into his bloodshot eyes, and cast a swift glance at the decanter.

"Won't you take something before you go?" she said sweetly.

"I — reckon — not, jest now," stammered Whiskey Dick, with a heroic effort.

"You 're right," said Christie. "I see you are like me. It 's too hot for anything fiery. Come with me."

She led him to the dining-room, and pouring out a

glass of iced tea handed it to him. Poor Dick was not prepared for this terrible culmination. Whiskey Dick and iced tea! But under pretense of seeing if it was properly flavored, Christie raised it to her own lips.

"Try it, to please me."

He drained the goblet.

"Now, then," said Christie gayly, "let 's find Jessie, and be off!"

CHAPTER V

WHATEVER might have been his other deficiencies as an escort, Whiskey Dick was a good horseman, and in spite of his fractious brute, exhibited such skill and confidence as to at once satisfy the young girls of his value to them in the management of their own horses, to whom side-saddles were still an alarming novelty. Jessie, who had probably already learned from her sister the purport of Dick's confidences, had received him with equal cordiality and perhaps a more unqualified amusement; and now, when fairly lifted into the saddle by his tremulous but respectful hands, made a very charming picture of youthful and rosy satisfaction. And when Christie, more fascinating than ever in her riding-habit, took her place on the other side of Dick, as they sallied from the gate, that gentleman felt his cup of happiness complete. His triumphal *entrée* into the world of civilization and fashion was secure. He did not regret the untasted liquor; here was an experience in after years to lean his back against comfortably in bar-rooms, to entrance or defy mankind. He had even got so far as to formulate in fancy the sentence: "I remember, gentlemen, that one afternoon, being on a pasear with two fash'nable young ladies," etc., etc.

At present, however, he was obliged to confine himself to the functions of an elegant guide and cicerone — when not engaged in "having it out" with his horse. Their way lay along the slope, crossing the highroad at right angles, to reach the deeper woods beyond. Dick would have lingered on the highway — ostensibly to point out to his com-

panions the new flume that had taken the place of the condemned ditch, but really in the hope of exposing himself in his glory to the curious eyes of the wayfaring world. Unhappily the road was deserted in the still powerful sunlight, and he was obliged to seek the cover of the woods, with a passing compliment to the parent of his charges. Waving his hand towards the flume, he said, "Look at that work of your father's; there ain't no other man in Californy but Philip Carr ez would hev the grit to hold up such a bluff agin natur and agin luck ez that yer flume stands for. I don't say it 'cause you 're his daughters, ladies! That ain't the style, ez *you* know, in sassiety, Miss Carr," he added, turning to Christie as the more socially experienced. "No! but there ain't another man to be found ez could do it. It cost already two hundred thousand; it 'll cost five hundred thousand afore it 's done; and every cent of it is got out of the yearth beneath it, or *hez got* to be out of it. 'T ain't ev'ry man, Miss Carr, ez hev got the pluck to pledge not only what he 's got, but what he reckons to git."

"But suppose he don't get it?" said Christie, slightly contracting her brows.

"Then there 's the flume to show for it," said Dick.

"But of what use is the flume, if there is n't any more gold?" continued Christie, almost angrily.

"That 's good from *you*, miss," said Dick, giving way to a fit of hilarity. "That 's good for a fash'nable young lady — own daughter of Philip Carr. She sez, says she," continued Dick, appealing to the sedate pines for appreciation of Christie's rare humor, "'Wot 's the use of a flume, when gold ain't there?' I must tell that to the boys."

"And what 's the use of the gold in the ground when the flume is n't there to work it out?" said Jessie to her sister, with a cautioning glance towards Dick.

But Dick did not notice the look that passed between the

sisters. The richer humor of Jessie's retort had thrown him into convulsions of laughter.

"And now *she* says, wot 's the use o' the gold without the flume? 'Xcuse me, ladies, but that 's just puttin' the hull questin that 's agitatin' this yer camp inter two speeches as clear as crystal. There 's the hull crowd outside — and some on 'em inside like Fairfax, hez their doubts — ez says with Miss Christie; and there 's all of us inside, ez holds Miss Jessie's views."

"I never heard Mr. Munroe say that the flume was wrong," said Jessie quickly.

"Not to you, nat'rally," said Dick, with a confidential look at Christie; "but I reckon he 'd like some of the money it cost laid out for suthin' else. But what 's the odds? The gold is there, and *we 're* bound to get it."

Dick was the foreman of a gang of paid workmen, who had replaced the millionaires in mere manual labor, and the *we* was a polite figure of speech.

The conversation seemed to have taken an unfortunate turn, and both the girls experienced a feeling of relief when they entered the long gulch or defile that led to Indian Spring. The track now becoming narrow, they were obliged to pass in single file along the precipitous hillside, led by this escort. This effectually precluded any further speech, and Christie at once surrendered herself to the calm, obliterating influences of the forest. The settlement and its gossip were far behind and forgotten. In the absorption of nature, her companions passed out of her mind, even as they sometimes passed out of her sight in the windings of the shadowy trail. As she rode alone, the fronds of breast-high ferns seemed to caress her with outstretched and gently detaining hands; strange wild-flowers sprang up through the parting underbrush; even the granite rocks that at times pressed closely upon the trail appeared as if cushioned to her contact with star-rayed mosses, or lightly

flung after her long lassoes of delicate vines. She recalled the absolute freedom of their *al-fresco* life in the old double cabin, when she spent the greater part of her waking hours under the mute trees in the encompassing solitude, and half regretting the more civilized restraints of this newer and more ambitious abode, forgot that she had ever rebelled against it. The social complication that threatened her now seemed to her rather the outcome of her half-civilized parlor than of the sylvan glade. How easy it would have been to have kept the cabin, and then to have gone away entirely, than for her father to have allowed them to be compromised with the growing fortunes of the settlement! The suspicions and distrust that she had always felt of their fortunes seemed to grow with the involuntary admission of Whiskey Dick that they were shared by others who were practical men. She was fain to have recourse to the prospect again to banish these thoughts, and this opened her eyes to the fact that her companions had been missing from the trail ahead of her for some time. She quickened her pace slightly to reach a projecting point of rock that gave her a more extended prospect. But they had evidently disappeared.

She was neither alarmed nor annoyed. She could easily overtake them soon, for they would miss her, and return or wait for her at the spring. At the worst she would have no difficulty in retracing her steps home. In her present mood, she could readily spare their company; indeed, she was not sorry that no other being should interrupt that sympathy with the free woods which was beginning to possess her.

She was destined, however, to be disappointed. She had not proceeded a hundred yards before she noticed the moving figure of a man beyond her in the hillside chaparral above the trail. He seemed to be going in the same direction as herself, and, as she fancied, endeavoring to avoid her. This excited her curiosity to the point of urging her

horse forward until the trail broadened into the level forest again, which she now remembered was a part of the environs of Indian Spring. The stranger hesitated, pausing once or twice with his back towards her, as if engaged in carefully examining the dwarf willows to select a switch. Christie slightly checked her speed as she drew nearer; when, as if obedient to a sudden resolution, he turned and advanced towards her. She was relieved and yet surprised to recognize the boyish face and figure of George Kearney. He was quite pale and agitated, although attempting, by a jaunty swinging of the switch he had just cut, to assume the appearance of ease and confidence.

Here was an opportunity. Christie resolved to profit by it. She did not doubt that the young fellow had already passed her sister on the trail, but, from bashfulness, had not dared to approach her. By inviting his confidence, she would doubtless draw something from him that would deny or corroborate her father's opinion of his sentiments. If he was really in love with Jessie, she would learn what reasons he had for expecting a serious culmination of his suit, and perhaps she might be able delicately to open his eyes to the truth. If, as she believed, it was only a boyish fancy, she would laugh him out of it with that camaraderie which had always existed between them. A half-motherly sympathy, albeit born quite as much from a contemplation of his beautiful yearning eyes as from his interesting position, lightened the smile with which she greeted him.

"So you contrived to throw over your stupid business and join us, after all," she said; "or was it that you changed your mind at the last moment?" she added mischievously. "I thought only we women were permitted that!" Indeed, she could not help noticing that there was really a strong feminine suggestion in the shifting color and slightly conscious eyelids of the young fellow.

"Do young girls always change their minds?" asked George, with an embarrassed smile.

"Not always; but sometimes they don't know their own mind — particularly if they are very young; and when they do at last, you clever creatures of men, who have interpreted their ignorance to please yourselves, abuse them for being fickle." She stopped to observe the effect of what she believed a rather clear and significant exposition of Jessie's and George's possible situation. But she was not prepared for the look of blank resignation that seemed to drive the color from his face and moisten the fire of his dark eyes.

"I reckon you 're right," he said, looking down.

"Oh! we 're not accusing you of fickleness," said Christie gayly; "although you did n't come, and we were obliged to ask Mr. Hall to join us. I suppose you found him and Jessie just now?"

But George made no reply. The color was slowly coming back to his face, which, as she glanced covertly at him, seemed to have grown so much older that his returning blood might have brought two or three years with it.

"Really, Mr. Kearney," she said dryly, "one would think that some silly, conceited girl" — she was quite earnest in her epithets, for a sudden, angry conviction of some coquetry and disingenuousness in Jessie had come to her in contemplating its effects upon the young fellow at her side — "some country jilt, had been trying her rustic hand upon you."

"She is not silly, conceited, nor countrified," said George, slowly raising his beautiful eyes to the young girl half reproachfully. "It is I who am all that. No, she is right, and you know it."

Much as Christie admired and valued her sister's charms, she thought this was really going too far. What had Jessie ever done — what was Jessie — to provoke and remain

insensible to such a blind devotion as this? And really, looking at him now, he was not so *very young* for Jessie; whether his unfortunate passion had brought out all his latent manliness, or whether he had hitherto kept his serious nature in the background, certainly he was not a boy. And certainly his was not a passion that he could be laughed out of. It was getting very tiresome. She wished she had not met him — at least until she had had some clearer understanding with her sister. He was still walking beside her, with his hand on her bridle rein, partly to lead her horse over some boulders in the trail, and partly to conceal his first embarrassment. When they had fairly reached the woods, he stopped.

"I am going to say good-by, Miss Carr."

"Are you not coming further? We must be near Indian Spring, now; Mr. Hall and — and Jessie — cannot be far away. You will keep me company until we meet them?"

"No," he replied quietly. "I only stopped you to say good-by. I am going away."

"Not from Devil's Ford?" she asked, in half-incredulous astonishment. "At least, not for long?"

"I am not coming back," he replied.

"But this is very abrupt," she said hurriedly, feeling that in some ridiculous way she had precipitated an equally ridiculous catastrophe. "Surely you are not going away in this fashion, without saying good-by to Jessie and — and father?"

"I shall see your father, of course — and you will give my regards to Miss Jessie."

He evidently was in earnest. Was there ever anything so perfectly preposterous? She became indignant.

"Of course," she said coldly, "I won't detain you; your business must be urgent, and I forgot — at least I had forgotten until to-day — that you have other duties more important than that of squire of dames. I am afraid this

forgetfulness made me think you would not part from us in quite such a business fashion. I presume, if you had not met me just now, we should none of us have seen you again?"

He did not reply.

"Will you say good-by, Miss Carr?"

He held out his hand.

"One moment, Mr. Kearney. If I have said anything which you think justifies this very abrupt leave-taking, I beg you will forgive and forget it — or, at least, let it have no more weight with you than the idle words of any woman. I only spoke generally. You know — I — I might be mistaken."

His eyes, which had dilated when she began to speak, darkened; his color, which had quickly come, as quickly sank when she had ended.

"Don't say that, Miss Carr. It is not like you, and — it is useless. You know what I meant a moment ago. I read it in your reply. You meant that I, like others, had deceived myself. Did you not?"

She could not meet those honest eyes with less than equal honesty. She knew that Jessie did not love him — would not marry him — whatever coquetry she might have shown.

"I did not mean to offend you," she said hesitatingly; "I only half suspected it when I spoke."

"And you wish to spare me the avowal?" he said bitterly.

"To me, perhaps, yes, by anticipating it. I could not tell what ideas you might have gathered from some indiscreet frankness of Jessie — or my father," she added, with almost equal bitterness.

"I have never spoken to either," he replied quickly. He stopped, and added, after a moment's mortifying reflection, "I've been brought up in the woods, Miss Carr, and I

suppose I have followed my feelings, instead of the etiquette of society."

Christie was too relieved at the rehabilitation of Jessie's truthfulness to notice the full significance of his speech.

"Good-by," he said again, holding out his hand.

"Good-by!"

She extended her own, ungloved, with a frank smile. He held it for a moment, with his eyes fixed upon hers. Then suddenly, as if obeying an uncontrollable impulse, he crushed it like a flower again and again against his burning lips, and darted away.

Christie sank back in her saddle with a little cry, half of pain and half of frightened surprise. Had the poor boy suddenly gone mad, or was this vicarious farewell a part of the courtship of Devil's Ford? She looked at her little hand, which had reddened under the pressure, and suddenly felt the flush extending to her cheeks and the roots of her hair. This was intolerable.

"Christie!"

It was her sister emerging from the wood to seek her. In another moment she was at her side.

"We thought you were following," said Jessie. "Good heavens! how you look! What has happened?"

"Nothing. I met Mr. Kearney a moment ago on the trail. He is going away, and — and" — She stopped, furious and flushing.

"And," said Jessie, with a burst of merriment, "he told you at last he loved you. Oh, Christie!"

CHAPTER VI

THE abrupt departure of George Kearney from Devil's Ford excited but little interest in the community, and was soon forgotten. It was generally attributed to differences between himself and his partners on the question of further outlay of their earnings on mining improvements — he and Philip Carr alone representing a sanguine minority whose faith in the future of the mine accepted any risks. It was alleged by some that he had sold out to his brother; it was believed by others that he had simply gone to Sacramento to borrow money on his share, in order to continue the improvements on his own responsibility. The partners themselves were uncommunicative; even Whiskey Dick, who since his remarkable social elevation had become less oracular, much to his own astonishment, contributed nothing to the gossip except a suggestion that as the fiery temper of George Kearney brooked no opposition, even from his brother, it was better they should separate before the estrangement became serious.

Mr. Carr did not disguise his annoyance at the loss of his young disciple and firm ally. But an unlucky allusion to his previous remarks on Kearney's attentions to Jessie, and a querulous regret that he had permitted a disruption of their social intimacy, brought such an ominous and frigid opposition, not only from Christie, but even from the frivolous Jessie herself, that Carr sank back in a crushed and terrified silence. "I only meant to say," he stammered after a pause, in which he, however, resumed his aggrieved manner, "that *Fairfax* seems to come here still, and *he* is not such a particular friend of mine."

"But he is — and has your interest entirely at heart," said Jessie stoutly, "and he only comes here to tell us how things are going on at the works."

"And criticise your father, I suppose," said Mr. Carr, with an attempt at jocularity that did not, however, disguise an irritated suspiciousness. "He really seems to have supplanted *me* as he has poor Kearney in your estimation."

"Now, father," said Jessie, suddenly seizing him by the shoulders in affected indignation, but really to conceal a certain embarrassment that sprang quite as much from her sister's quietly observant eye as her father's speech, "you promised to let this ridiculous discussion drop. You will make me and Christie so nervous that we will not dare to open the door to a visitor, until he declares his innocence of any matrimonial intentions. You don't want to give color to the gossip that agreement with your views about the improvements is necessary to getting on with us."

"Who dares talk such rubbish?" said Carr, reddening; "is that the kind of gossip that Fairfax brings here?"

"Hardly, when it 's known that he don't quite agree with you, and *does* come here. That 's the best denial of the gossip."

Christie, who had of late loftily ignored these discussions, waited until her father had taken his departure.

"Then that is the reason why you still see Mr. Munroe, after what you said," she remarked quietly to Jessie.

Jessie, who would have liked to escape with her father, was obliged to pause on the threshold of the door, with a pretty assumption of blank forgetfulness in her blue eyes and lifted eyebrows.

"Said what? when?" she asked vacantly.

"When — when Mr. Kearney that day — in the woods — went away," said Christie, faintly coloring.

"Oh! *that* day," said Jessie briskly; "the day he just

gloved your hand with kisses, and then fled wildly into the forest to conceal his emotion."

"The day he behaved very foolishly," said Christie, with reproachful calmness, that did not, however, prevent a suspicion of indignant moisture in her eyes — "when you explained" —

"That it was n't meant for *me*," interrupted Jessie.

"That it was to you that *Mr. Munroe's* attentions were directed. And then we agreed that it was better to prevent any further advances of this kind by avoiding any familiar relations with either of them."

"Yes," said Jessie, "I remember; but you 're not confounding my seeing Fairfax occasionally now with that sort of thing. *He* does n't kiss my hand like anything," she added, as if in abstract reflection.

"Nor run away, either," suggested the trodden worm, turning.

There was an ominous silence.

"Do you know we are nearly out of coffee?" said Jessie, choking, but moving towards the door with Spartan-like calmness.

"Yes. And something must be done this very day about the washing," said Christie, with suppressed emotion, going towards the opposite entrance.

Tears stood in each other's eyes with this terrible exchange of domestic confidences. Nevertheless, after a moment's pause, they deliberately turned again, and facing each other with frightful calmness, left the room by purposeless and deliberate exits other than those they had contemplated — a crushing abnegation of self, that, to some extent, relieved their surcharged feelings.

Meantime the material prosperity of Devil's Ford increased, if a prosperity based upon no visible foundation but the confidence and hopes of its inhabitants could be called material. Few, if any, stopped to consider that

the improvements, buildings, and business were simply the outlay of capital brought from elsewhere, and as yet the settlement or town, as it was now called, had neither produced nor exported capital of itself equal to half the amount expended. It was true that some land was cultivated on the further slope, some mills erected and lumber furnished from the inexhaustible forest; but the consumers were the inhabitants themselves, who paid for their produce in borrowed capital or unlimited credit. It was never discovered that while all roads led to Devil's Ford, Devil's Ford led to nowhere. The difficulties overcome in getting things into the settlement were never surmounted for getting things out of it. The lumber was practically valueless for export to other settlements across the mountain roads, which were equally rich in timber. The theory so enthusiastically held by the original locators, that Devil's Ford was a vast sink that had, through ages, exhausted and absorbed the trickling wealth of the adjacent hills and valleys, was suffering an ironical corroboration.

One morning it was known that work was stopped at the Devil's Ford Ditch — temporarily only, it was alleged, and many of the old workmen simply had their labor for the present transferred to excavating the river-banks, and the collection of vast heaps of "pay gravel." Specimens from these mounds, taken from different localities, and at different levels, were sent to San Francisco for more rigid assay and analysis. It was believed that this would establish the fact of the permanent richness of the drifts, and not only justify past expenditure, but a renewed outlay of credit and capital. The suspension of engineering work gave Mr. Carr an opportunity to visit San Francisco on general business of the mine, which would not, however, prevent him from arranging further combinations with capital. His two daughters accompanied him. It offered an admirable opportunity for a shopping expedition, a change

of scene, and a peaceful solution of their perplexing and anomalous social relations with Devil's Ford. In the first flush of gratitude to their father for this opportune holiday, something of harmony had been restored to the family circle that had of late been shaken by discord.

But their sanguine hopes of enjoyment were not entirely fulfilled. Both Jessie and Christie were obliged to confess to a certain disappointment in the aspect of the civilization they were now reëntering. They at first attributed it to the change in their own habits during the last three months, and their having become barbarous and countrified in their seclusion. Certainly in the matter of dress they were behind the fashions as revealed in Montgomery Street. But when the brief solace afforded them by the modiste and dressmaker was past, there seemed little else to be gained. They missed at first, I fear, the chivalrous and loyal devotion that had only amused them at Devil's Ford, and were the more inclined, I think, to distrust the conscious and more civilized gallantry of the better dressed and more carefully presented men they met. For it must be admitted that, for obvious reasons, their criticisms were at first confined to the sex they had been most in contact with. They could not help noticing that the men were more eager, annoyingly feverish, and self-asserting in their superior elegance and external show than their old associates were in their frank, unrestrained habits. It seemed to them that the five millionaires of Devil's Ford, in their radical simplicity and thoroughness, were perhaps nearer the type of true gentlemanhood than these citizens who imitated a civilization they were unable yet to reach.

The women simply frightened them, as being, even more than the men, demonstrative and excessive in their fine looks, their fine dresses, their extravagant demand for excitement. In less than a week they found themselves regretting — not the new villa on the slope of Devil's Ford,

which even in its own bizarre fashion was exceeded by the barbarous ostentation of the villas and private houses around them — but the double cabin under the trees, which now seemed to them almost aristocratic in its grave simplicity and abstention. In the mysterious forest of masts that thronged the city's quays they recalled the straight shafts of the pines on Devil's slopes, only to miss the sedate repose and infinite calm that used to environ them. In the feverish, pulsating life of the young metropolis they often stopped oppressed, giddy, and choking; the roar of the streets and thoroughfares was meaningless to them, except to revive strange memories of the deep, unvarying monotone of the evening wind over their humbler roof on the Sierran hillside. Civic bred and nurtured as they were, the recurrence of these sensations perplexed and alarmed them.

"It seems so perfectly ridiculous," said Jessie, "for us to feel as out of place here as that Pike County servant girl in Sacramento who had never seen a steamboat before; do you know, I quite had a turn the other day at seeing a man on the Stockton wharf in a red shirt, with a rifle on his shoulder."

"And you wanted to go and speak to him?" said Christie, with a sad smile.

"No, that's just it; I felt awfully hurt and injured that he did not come up and speak to *me!* I wonder if we got any fever or that sort of thing up there; it makes one quite superstitious."

Christie did not reply; more than once before she had felt that inexplicable misgiving. It had sometimes seemed to her that she had never been quite herself since that memorable night when she had slipped out of their sleeping-cabin, and stood alone in the gracious and commanding presence of the woods and hills. In the solitude of night, with the hum of the great city rising below her — at times

even in theatres or crowded assemblies of men and women — she forgot herself, and again stood in the weird brilliancy of that moonlight night in mute worship at the foot of that slowly rising mystic altar of piled terraces, hanging forests, and lifted plateaus that climbed forever to the lonely skies. Again she felt before her the expanding and opening arms of the protecting woods. Had they really closed upon her in some pantheistic embrace that made her a part of them? Had she been baptized in that moonlight as a child of the great forest? It was easy to believe in the myths of the poets of an idyllic life under those trees, where, free from conventional restrictions, one loved and was loved. If she, with her own worldly experience, could think of this now, why might not George Kearney have thought? . . . She stopped, and found herself blushing even in the darkness. As the thought and blush were the usual sequel of her reflections, it is to be feared that they may have been at times the impelling cause.

Mr. Carr, however, made up for his daughters' want of sympathy with metropolitan life. To their astonishment, he not only plunged into the fashionable gayeties and amusements of the town, but in dress and manner assumed the rôle of a leader of society. The invariable answer to their half-humorous comment was the necessities of the mine, and the policy of frequenting the company of capitalists, to enlist their support and confidence. There was something in this so unlike their father, that what at any other time they would have hailed as a relief to his habitual abstraction now half alarmed them. Yet he was not dissipated — he did not drink nor gamble. There certainly did not seem any harm in his frequenting the society of ladies, with a gallantry that appeared to be forced and a pleasure that to their critical eyes was certainly apocryphal. He did not drag his daughters into the mixed society of that period; he did not press upon them the company of

Devil's Ford

They went out more; they frequented concerts and parties; they accepted, with their host and his family, an invitation to one of those opulent and barbaric entertainments with which a noted San Francisco millionaire distracted his rare moments of reflection in his gorgeous palace on the hills. Here they would at least be once more in the country they loved, albeit of a milder and less heroic type, and a little degraded by the overlapping tinsel and scattered spangles of the palace.

It was a three days' fête; the style and choice of amusements left to the guests, and an equal and active participation by no means necessary or indispensable. Consequently, when Christie and Jessie Carr proposed a ride through the adjacent cañon on the second morning, they had no difficulty in finding horses in the well-furnished stables of their opulent entertainers, nor cavaliers among the other guests, who were too happy to find favor in the eyes of two pretty girls who were supposed to be abnormally fastidious and refined. Christie's escort was a good-natured young banker, shrewd enough to avoid demonstrative attentions, and lucky enough to interest her during the ride with his clear and half-humorous reflections on some of the business speculations of the day. If his ideas were occasionally too clever, and not always consistent with a high sense of honor, she was none the less interested to know the ethics of that world of speculation into which her father had plunged, and the more convinced, with a mingled sense of pride and anxiety, that his still dominant gentlemanhood would prevent his coping with it on equal terms. Nor could she help contrasting the conversation of the sharp-witted man at her side with what she still remembered of the vague, touching, boyish enthusiasm of the millionaires of Devil's Ford. Had her escort guessed the result of this contrast, he would hardly have been as gratified as he was with the grave attention of her beautiful eyes.

The fascination of a gracious day and the leafy solitude of the cañon led them to prolong their ride beyond the proposed limit, and it became necessary towards sunset for them to seek some shorter cut home.

"There 's a vaquero in yonder field," said Christie's escort, who was riding with her a little in advance of the others, "and those fellows know every trail that a horse can follow. I 'll ride on, intercept him, and try my Spanish on him. If I miss him, as he 's galloping on, you might try your hand on him yourself. He 'll understand your eyes, Miss Carr, in any language."

As he dashed away, to cover his first audacity of compliment, Christie lifted the eyes thus apostrophized to the opposite field. The vaquero, who was chasing some cattle, was evidently too preoccupied to heed the shouts of her companion, and wheeling round suddenly to intercept one of the deviating fugitives, permitted Christie's escort to dash past him before that gentleman could rein in his excited steed. This brought the vaquero directly in her path. Perceiving her, he threw his horse back on its haunches, to prevent a collision. Christie rode up to him, suddenly uttered a cry, and halted. For before her, sunburnt in cheek and throat, darker in the free growth of mustache and curling hair, clad in the coarse, picturesque finery of his class, undisguised only in his boyish beauty, sat George Kearney.

The blood that had forsaken her astonished face rushed as quickly back. His eyes, which had suddenly sparkled with an electrical glow, sank before hers. His hand dropped, and his cheek flushed with a dark embarrassment.

"You here, Mr. Kearney? How strange! — but how glad I am to meet you again!"

She tried to smile; her voice trembled, and her little hand shook as she extended it to him.

He raised his dark eyes quickly, and impulsively urged

his horse to her side. But, as if suddenly awakening to the reality of the situation, he glanced at her hurriedly, down at his barbaric finery, and threw a searching look towards her escort.

In an instant Christie saw the infelicity of her position, and its dangers. The words of Whiskey Dick, "He would n't stand that," flashed across her mind. There was no time to lose. The banker had already gained control over his horse, and was approaching them, all unconscious of the fixed stare with which George was regarding him. Christie hastily seized the hand which he had allowed to fall at his side, and said quickly: —

"Will you ride with me a little way, Mr. Kearney?"

He turned the same searching look upon her. She met it clearly and steadily; he even thought reproachfully.

"Do!" she said hurriedly. "I ask it as a favor. I want to speak to you. Jessie and I are here alone. Father is away. *You* are one of our oldest friends."

He hesitated. She turned to the astonished young banker, who rode up.

"I have just met an old friend. Will you please ride back as quickly as you can, and tell Jessie that Mr. Kearney is here, and ask her to join us?"

She watched her dazed escort, still speechless from the spectacle of the fastidious Miss Carr *tête-à-tête* with a common Mexican vaquero, gallop off in the direction of the cañon, and then turned to George.

"Now take me home, the shortest way, as quick as you can."

"Home?" echoed George.

"I mean to Mr. Prince's house. Quick! before they can come up to us."

He mechanically put spurs to his horse; she followed. They presently struck into a trail that soon diverged again into a disused logging track through the woods.

"This is the short cut to Prince's, by two miles," he said, as they entered the woods.

As they were still galloping, without exchanging a word, Christie began to slacken her speed; George did the same. They were safe from intrusion at the present, even if the others had found the short cut. Christie, bold and self-reliant a moment ago, suddenly found herself growing weak and embarrassed. What had she done?

She checked her horse suddenly.

"Perhaps we had better wait for them," she said timidly.

George had not raised his eyes to hers.

"You said you wanted to hurry home," he replied gently, passing his hand along his mustang's velvety neck, "and — and you had something to say to me."

"Certainly," she answered, with a faint laugh. "I 'm so astonished at meeting you here. I 'm quite bewildered. You are living here; you have forsaken us to buy a ranch?" she continued, looking at him attentively.

His brow colored slightly.

"No, I 'm living here, but I have bought no ranch. I 'm only a hired man on somebody else's ranch, to look after the cattle."

He saw her beautiful eyes fill with astonishment and — something else. His brow cleared; he went on, with his old boyish laugh.

"No, Miss Carr. The fact is, I 'm dead broke. I 've lost everything since I saw you last. But as I know how to ride, and I 'm not afraid of work, I manage to keep along."

"You have lost money in — in the mines?" said Christie suddenly.

"No" — he replied quickly, evading her eyes. "My brother has my interest, you know. I 've been foolish on my own account solely. You know I 'm rather inclined to that sort of thing. But as long as my folly don't affect others, I can stand it."

"But it may affect others — and *they* may not think of it as folly" — She stopped short, confused by his brightening color and eyes. "I mean — Oh, Mr. Kearney, I want you to be frank with me. I know nothing of business, but I know there has been trouble about the mine at Devil's Ford. Tell me honestly, has my father anything to do with it? If I thought that, through any imprudence of his, you had suffered — if I believed that you could trace any misfortune of yours to him — to *us* — I should never forgive myself" — she stopped and flashed a single look at him — "I should never forgive *you* for abandoning us."

The look of pain which had at first shown itself in his face, which never concealed anything, passed, and a quick smile followed her feminine anticlimax.

"Miss Carr," he said, with boyish eagerness, "if any man suggested to me that your father was n't the brightest and best of his kind — too wise and clever for the fools about him to understand — I 'd — I 'd shoot him."

Confused by his ready and gracious disclaimer of what she had *not* intended to say, there was nothing left for her but to rush upon what she really intended to say, with what she felt was shameful precipitation.

"One word more, Mr. Kearney," she began, looking down, but feeling the color come to her face as she spoke. "When you spoke to me the day you left, you must have thought me hard and cruel. When I tell you that I thought you were alluding to Jessie and some feeling you had for her" —

"For Jessie!" echoed George.

"You will understand that — that" —

"That what?" said George, drawing nearer to her.

"That I was only speaking as she might have spoken had you talked to her of me," added Christie hurriedly, slightly backing her horse away from him.

But this was not so easy, as George was the better rider,

and by an imperceptible movement of his wrist and foot had glued his horse to her side. "He will go now," she had thought, but he did n't.

"We must ride on," she suggested faintly.

"No," he said, with a sudden dropping of his boyish manner and a slight lifting of his head. "We must ride together no further, Miss Carr. I must go back to the work I am hired to do, and you must go on with your party, whom I hear coming. But when we part here you must bid me good-by — not as Jessie's sister — but as Christie — the one — the only woman that I love, or that I ever have loved."

He held out his hand. With the recollection of their previous parting, she tremblingly advanced her own. He took it, but did not raise it to his lips. And it was she who found herself half confusedly retaining his hand in hers, until she dropped it with a blush.

"Then is this the reason you give for deserting us as you have deserted Devil's Ford?" she said coldly.

He lifted his eyes to her with a strange smile, and said, "Yes," wheeled his horse, and disappeared in the forest.

He had left her thus abruptly once before, kissed, blushing, and indignant. He was leaving her now, unkissed, but white and indignant. Yet she was so self-possessed when the party joined her, that the singular rencontre and her explanation of the stranger's sudden departure excited no further comment. Only Jessie managed to whisper in her ear: —

"I hope you are satisfied now that it was n't me he meant?"

"Not at all," said Christie coldly.

CHAPTER VII

A FEW days after the girls had returned to San Francisco they received a letter from their father. His business, he wrote, would detain him in Sacramento some days longer. There was no reason why they should return to Devil's Ford in the heat of the summer; their host had written to beg him to allow them a more extended visit, and if they were enjoying themselves, he thought it would be well not to disoblige an old friend. He had heard they had a pleasant visit to Mr. Prince's place, and that a certain young banker had been very attentive to Christie.

"Do you know what all this means, dear?" asked Jessie, who had been watching her sister with an unusually grave face.

Christie, whose thoughts had wandered from the letter, replied carelessly: —

"I suppose it means that we are to wait here until father sends for us."

"It means a good deal more. It means that papa has had another reverse; it means that the assay has turned out badly for the mine — that the further they go from the flat the worse it gets — that all the gold they will probably ever see at Devil's Ford is what they have already found or will find on the flat; it means that all Devil's Ford is only a 'pocket,' and not a 'lead.'" She stopped, with unexpected tears in her eyes.

"Who told you this?" asked Christie breathlessly.

"Fairfax — Mr. Munroe," stammered her sister, "writes to me as if we already knew it — tells me not to be alarmed, that it is n't so bad — and all that."

"How long has this happened, Jessie?" said Christie, taking her hand, with a white but calm face.

"Nearly ever since we've been here, I suppose. It must be so, for he says poor papa is still hopeful of doing something yet."

"And Mr. Munroe writes to you?" said Christie abstractedly.

"Of course," said Jessie quickly. "He feels interested in — us."

"Nobody tells *me* anything," said Christie.

"Did n't" —

"No," said Christie bitterly.

"What on earth *did* you talk about? But people don't confide in you because they're afraid of you. You're so" —

"So what?"

"So gently patronizing, and so 'I-don't-suppose-you-can-help-it,-poor-thing,' in your general style," said Jessie, kissing her. "There! I only wish I was like you. What do you say if we write to father that we'll go back to Devil's Ford? Mr. Munroe thinks we will be of service there just now. If the men are dissatisfied, and think we're spending money" —

"I'm afraid Mr. Munroe is hardly a disinterested adviser. At least, I don't think it would look quite decent for you to fly back without your father, at his suggestion," said Christie coldly. "He is not the only partner. We're spending no money. Besides, we have engaged to go to Mr. Prince's again next week."

"As you like, dear," said Jessie, turning away to hide a faint smile.

Nevertheless, when they returned from their visit to Mr. Prince's, and one or two uneventful rides, Christie looked grave. It was only a few days later that Jessie burst upon her one morning.

"You were saying that nobody ever tells you anything. Well, here 's your chance. Whiskey Dick is below."

"Whiskey Dick?" repeated Christie. "What does he want?"

"*You*, love. Who else? You know he always scorns me as not being high-toned and elegant enough for his social confidences. He asked for you only."

With an uneasy sense of some impending revelation, Christie descended to the drawing-room. As she opened the door, a strong flavor of that toilet soap and eau de Cologne with which Whiskey Dick was in the habit of gracefully effacing the traces of dissipation made known his presence. In spite of a new suit of clothes, whose pristine folds refused to adapt themselves entirely to the contour of his figure, he was somewhat subdued by the unexpected elegance of the drawing-room of Christie's host. But a glance at Christie's sad, but gracious face quickly reassured him. Taking from his hat a three-cornered parcel, he unfolded a handsome saffrona rose, which he gravely presented to her. Having thus reëstablished his position, he sank elegantly into a *tête-à-tête* ottoman. Finding the position inconvenient to face Christie, who had seated herself on a chair, he transferred himself to the other side of the ottoman, and addressed her over its back as from a pulpit.

"Is this really a fortunate accident, Mr. Hall, or did you try to find us?" said Christie pleasantly.

"Partly promiskuss, and partly coincident, Miss Christie, one up and t'other down," said Dick lightly. "Work being slack at present at Devil's Ford I reck'ned I 'd take a pasear down to 'Frisco, and dip into the vortex o' fash'nable society and out again." He lightly waved a new handkerchief to illustrate his swallow-like intrusion. "This yer minglin' with the *bo-tong* is apt to be wearisome, ez you and me knows, unless combined with experience and

judgment. So when them boys up there allows that there 's a little too much fash'nable society and San Francisco capital and highfalutin' about the future goin' on fer square surface mining, I sez, 'Look yere, gentlemen,' sez I, 'you don't see the pint. The pint is, to get the pop'lar eye fixed, so to speak, on Devil's Ford. When a fash'nable star rises above the 'Frisco horizon — like Miss Carr — and, so to speak, dazzles the gineral eye, people want to know who she is. And when people say that 's the accomplished daughter o' the accomplished superintendent of the Devil's Ford claim — otherwise known as the Star-eyed Goddess o' Devil's Ford — every eye is fixed on the mine, and Capital, so to speak, tumbles to her.' And when they sez that the old man — excuse my freedom, but that 's the way the boys talk of your father, meaning no harm — the old man, instead o' trying to corral rich widders — grass or otherwise — to spend their money on the big works for the gold that ain't there yet — should stay in Devil's Ford and put all his sabe and genius into grindin' out the little gold that is there, I sez to them that it ain't your father's style. 'His style,' sez I, 'ez to go in and build them works.' When they 're done he turns round to Capital, and sez he — 'Look yer,' sez he, 'thar 's all the works you want, first quality — cost a million; thar 's all the water you want, onlimited — cost another million; thar 's all the pay gravel you want in and outer the ground — call it two millions more. Now my time 's too vally-'ble; my professhun 's too high-toned to *work* mines. I *make* 'em. Hand me over a check for ten millions and call it square and work it for yourself.' So Capital hands over the money and waltzes down to run the mine, and you original locators walks round with yer hands in yer pockets atop of your six million profit, and you lets Capital take the work and the responsibility."

Preposterous as this seemed from the lips of Whiskey

Dick, Christie had a haunting suspicion that it was not greatly unlike the theories expounded by the clever young banker who had been her escort. She did not interrupt his flow of reminiscent criticism; when he paused for breath, she said quietly: —

"I met Mr. George Kearney the other day in the country."

Whiskey Dick stopped awkwardly, glanced hurriedly at Christie, and coughed behind his handkerchief.

"Mr. Kearney — eh — er — certengly — yes — er — met him, you say. Was he — er — er — well?"

"In health, yes; but otherwise he has lost everything," said Christie, fixing her eyes on the embarrassed Dick.

"Yes — er — in course — in course" — continued Dick, nervously glancing round the apartment as if endeavoring to find an opening to some less abrupt statement of the fact.

"And actually reduced to take some menial employment," added Christie, still regarding Dick with her clear glance.

"That 's it — that 's just it," said Dick, beaming as he suddenly found his delicate and confidential opportunity. "That 's it, Miss Christie; that 's just what I was sayin' to the boys. 'Ez it the square thing,' sez I, 'jest because George hez happened to hypothecate every dollar he has, or expects to hev, to put into them works, only to please Mr. Carr, and just because he don't want to distress that intelligent gentleman by letting him see he 's dead broke — for him to go and demean himself and Devil's Ford by rushing away and hiring out as a Mexican vaquero on Mexican wages? Look,' sez I, 'at the disgrace he brings upon a high-toned, fash'nable girl, at whose side he 's walked and danced, and passed rings, and sentiments, and bokays in the changes o' the cotillion and the mizzourka. And wot,' sez I, 'if some day, prancing along in a fash'nable cavalcade, she all of a suddents comes across him drivin' a Mexican steer?' That 's what I said to the boys.

And so you met him, Miss Christie, as usual," continued Dick, endeavoring under the appearance of a large social experience to conceal an eager anxiety to know the details — "so you met him; and, in course, you did n't let on yer knew him, so to speak, nat'rally, or p'r'aps you kinder like asked him to fix your saddle-girth, and give him a five-dollar piece — eh?"

Christie, who had risen and gone to the window, suddenly turned a very pale face and shining eyes on Dick.

"Mr. Hall," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "we are old friends, and I feel I can ask you a favor. You once before acted as our escort — it was for a short but a happy time — will you accept a larger trust? My father is busy in Sacramento for the mine: will you, without saying anything to anybody, take Jessie and me back at once to Devil's Ford?"

"Will I? Miss Christie," said Dick, choking between an intense gratification and a desire to keep back its vulgar exhibition, "I shall be proud!"

"When I say keep it a secret" — she hesitated — "I don't mean that I object to your letting Mr. Kearney, if you happen to know where he is, understand that we are going back to Devil's Ford."

"Cert'nly — nat'rally," said Dick, waving his hand gracefully; "sorter drop him a line, saying that bizness of a social and delicate nature — being the escort of Miss Christie and Jessie Carr to Devil's Ford — prevents my having the pleasure of calling."

"That will do very well, Mr. Hall," said Christie, faintly smiling through her moist eyelashes. "Then will you go at once and secure tickets for to-night's boat, and bring them here? Jessie and I will arrange everything else."

"Cert'nly," said Dick impulsively, and preparing to take a graceful leave.

"We 'll be impatient until you return with the tickets," said Christie graciously.

Dick shook hands gravely, got as far as the door, and paused.

"You think it better to take the tickets now?" he said dubiously.

"By all means," said Christie impetuously. "I 've set my heart on going to-night — and unless you secure berths early" —

"In course — in course," interrupted Dick nervously. "But" —

"But what?" said Christie impatiently.

Dick hesitated, shut the door carefully, and looking round the room, lightly shook out his handkerchief, apparently flicked away an embarrassing suggestion, and said, with a little laugh: —

"It 's ridiklous, perfectly ridiklous, Miss Christie; but not bein' in the habit of carryin' ready money, and havin' omitted to cash a draft on Wells, Fargo & Co." —

"Of course," said Christie rapidly. "How forgetful I am! Pray forgive me, Mr. Hall. I did n't think. I 'll run up and get it from our host; he will be glad to be our banker."

"One moment, Miss Christie," said Dick lightly, as his thumb and finger relaxed in his waistcoat pocket over the only piece of money in the world that had remained to him after his extravagant purchase of Christie's saffrona rose, "one moment: in this yer monetary transaction, if you like, you are at liberty to use *my* name."

CHAPTER VIII

As Christie and Jessie Carr looked from the windows of the coach, whose dust-clogged wheels were slowly dragging them, as if reluctant, nearer the last stage of their journey to Devil's Ford, they were conscious of a change in the landscape, which they could not entirely charge upon their changed feelings. The few bared open spaces on the upland, the long stretch of rocky ridge near the summit, so vivid and so velvety during their first journey, were now burnt and yellow; even the brief openings in the forest were seared as if by a hot iron in the scorching rays of a half year's sun. The pastoral slopes of the valley below were cloaked in lustreless leather: the rare watercourses along the road had faded from the waiting eye and ear; it seemed as if the long and dry summer had even invaded the close-set ranks of pines, and had blown a simoom breath through the densest woods, leaving its charred red ashes on every leaf and spray along the tunneled shade. As they leaned out of the window and inhaled the half-dead spices of the evergreens, they seemed to have entered the atmosphere of some exhausted passion — of some fierce excitement that was even now slowly burning itself out.

It was a relief at last to see the straggling houses of Devil's Ford far below come once more into view, as they rounded the shoulder of Devil's Spur and began the long descent. But as they entered the town a change more ominous and startling than the desiccation of the landscape forced itself upon them. The town was still there, but where were the inhabitants? Four months ago they had

left the straggling street thronged with busy citizens — groups at every corner, and a chaos of merchandise and traders in the open plaza or square beside the Presbyterian church. Now, all was changed. Only a few wayfarers lifted their heads lazily as the coach rattled by, crossing the deserted square littered with empty boxes, and gliding past empty cabins or vacant shop windows, from which not only familiar faces, but even the window-sashes themselves, were gone. The great unfinished serpent-like flume, crossing the river on gigantic trestles, had advanced as far as the town, stooping over it like some enormous reptile that had sucked its life-blood and was gorged with its prey.

Whiskey Dick, who had left the stage on the summit to avail himself of a shorter foot trail to the house, that would give him half an hour's grace to make preparations, met them at the stage office with a buggy. A glance at the young girls, perhaps, convinced him that the graces of elegant worldly conversation were out of place with the revelation he read on their faces. Perhaps he, too, was a trifle indisposed. The short journey to the house was made in profound silence.

The villa had been repainted and decorated, and it looked fresher, and even, to their preoccupied minds, appeared more attractive than ever. Thoughtful hands had taken care of the vines and rose-bushes on the trellises; water — that precious element in Devil's Ford — had not been spared in keeping green through the long drought the plants which the girls had so tenderly nurtured. It was the one oasis in which the summer still lingered; and yet a singular sense of loss came over the girls as they once more crossed its threshold. It seemed no longer their own.

"Ef I was you, Miss Christie, I 'd keep close to the house for a day or two, until — until — things is settled," said Dick; "there 's a heap o' tramps and sich cattle traipsin' round. P'r'aps you would n't feel so lonesome if you

was nearer town — for instance, 'bout wher' you useter live."

"In the dear old cabin," said Christie quickly; "I remember it; I wish we were there now."

"Do you really? Do you?" said Whiskey Dick, with suddenly twinkling eyes. "That 's like you to say it. That 's what I allus said," continued Dick, addressing space generally; "if there 's any one ez knows how to come square down to the bottom rock without flinchin', it 's your high-toned, fash'nable gals. But I must meander back to town, and let the boys know you 're in possession, safe and sound. It 's right mean that Fairfax and Mattingly had to go down to La Grange on some low business yesterday, but they 'll be back to-morrow. So long."

Left alone, the girls began to realize their strange position. They had conceived no settled plan. The night they left San Francisco they had written an earnest letter to their father, telling him that on learning the truth about the reverses of Devil's Ford, they thought it their duty to return and share them with others, without obliging him to prefer the request, and with as little worry to him as possible. He would find them ready to share his trials, and in what must be the scene of their work hereafter.

"It will bring father back," said Christie; "he won't leave us here alone; and then together we must come to some understanding with him — with *them* — for somehow I feel as if this house belonged to us no longer."

Her surmise was not far wrong. When Mr. Carr arrived hurriedly from Sacramento the next evening, he found the house deserted. His daughters were gone; there were indications that they had arrived, and, for some reason, suddenly departed. The vague fear that had haunted his guilty soul after receiving their letter, and during his breathless journey, now seemed to be realized. He was turning from the empty house, whose reproachful solitude

frightened him, when he was confronted on the threshold by the figure of Fairfax Munroe.

"I came to the stage office to meet you," he said; "you must have left the stage at the summit."

"I did," said Carr angrily. "I was anxious to meet my daughters quickly, to know the reason of their foolish alarm, and to know also who had been frightening them. Where are they?"

"They are safe in the old cabin beyond, that has been put up ready to receive them again," said Fairfax quietly.

"But what is the meaning of this? Why are they not here?" demanded Carr, hiding his agitation in a burst of querulous rage.

"Do *you* ask, Mr. Carr?" said Fairfax sadly. "Did you expect them to remain here until the sheriff took possession? No one knows better than yourself that the money advanced you on the deeds of this homestead has never been repaid."

Carr staggered, but recovered himself with feeble violence.

"Since you know so much of my affairs, how do you know that this claim will ever be pressed for payment? How do you know it is not the advance of a — a — friend?"

"Because I have seen the woman who advanced it," said Fairfax hopelessly. "She was here to look at the property before your daughters came."

"Well?" said Carr nervously.

"Well! You force me to tell you something I should like to forget. You force me to anticipate a disclosure I expected to make to you only when I came to ask permission to woo your daughter Jessie; and when I tell you what it is, you will understand that I have no right to criticise your conduct. I am only explaining my own."

"Go on," said Carr impatiently.

"When I first came to this country, there was a woman

I loved passionately. She treated me as women of her kind only treat men like me, she ruined me, and left me. That was four years ago. I love your daughter, Mr. Carr, but she has never heard it from my lips. I would not woo her until I had told you all. I have tried to do it ere this, and failed. Perhaps I should not now, but" —

"But what?" said Carr furiously; "speak out!"

"But this. Look!" said Fairfax, producing from his pocket the packet of letters Jessie had found; "perhaps you know the handwriting?"

"What do you mean?" gasped Carr.

"That woman — my mistress — is the woman who advanced you money, and who claims this house."

. . . . . .

The interview, and whatever came of it, remained a secret with the two men. When Mr. Carr accepted the hospitality of the old cabin again, it was understood that he had sacrificed the new house and its furniture to some of the more pressing debts of the mine, and the act went far to restore his waning popularity. But a more genuine feeling of relief was experienced by Devil's Ford when it was rumored that Fairfax Munroe had asked for the hand of Jessie Carr, and that some promise, contingent upon the equitable adjustment of the affairs of the mine, had been given by Mr. Carr. To the superstitious mind of Devil's Ford and its few remaining locators, this new partnership seemed to promise that unity of interest and stability of fortune that Devil's Ford had lacked. But nothing could be done until the rainy season had set fairly in; until the long-looked-for element that was to magically separate the gold from the dross in those dull mounds of dust and gravel had come of its own free will, and in its own appointed channels, independent of the feeble auxiliaries that had hopelessly riven the rocks on the hillside, or hung incomplete and unfinished in lofty scaffoldings above the settlement.

The rainy season came early. At first in gathered mists on the higher peaks that were lifted in the morning sun only to show a fresher field of dazzling white below; in white clouds that at first seemed to be mere drifts blown across from those fresh snow-fields, and obscuring the clear blue above; in far-off murmurs in the hollow hills and gulches; in nearer tinkling melody and baby prattling in the leaves. It came with bright flashes of sunlight by day, with deep, monotonous shadow at night; with the onset of heavy winds, the roar of turbulent woods, the tumultuous tossing of leafy arms, and with what seemed the silent dissolution of the whole landscape in days of steady and uninterrupted downfall. It came extravagantly, for every cañon had grown into a torrent, every gulch a waterspout, every watercourse a river, and all pouring into the North Fork, that, rushing past the settlement, seemed to threaten it with lifted crest and flying mane. It came dangerously, for one night the river, leaping the feeble barrier of Devil's Ford, swept away houses and banks, scattered with unconscious irony the laboriously collected heaps of gravel left for hydraulic machinery, and spread out a vast and silent lake across the submerged flat.

In the hurry and confusion of that night, the girls had thrown open their cabin to the escaping miners, who hurried along the slope that was now the bank of the river. Suddenly Christie felt her arm grasped, and she was half led, half dragged, into the inner room. Her father stood before her.

"Where is George Kearney?" he asked tremulously.

"George Kearney!" echoed Christie, for a moment believing the excitement had turned her father's brain. "You know he is not here; he is in San Francisco."

"He is here — I tell you," said Carr impatiently; "he has been here ever since the high water, trying to save the flume and reservoir."

"George — here!" Christie could only gasp.

"Yes! He passed here a few moments ago, to see if you were all safe, and he has gone on towards the flume. But what he is trying to do is madness. If you see him, implore him to do no more. Let him abandon the accursed flume to its fate. It has worked already too much woe upon us all; why should it carry his brave and youthful soul down with it?"

The words were still ringing in her ears, when he suddenly passed away, with the hurrying crowd. Scarcely knowing what she did, she ran out, vaguely intent only on one thought, seeking only the one face, lately so dear in recollection that she felt she would die if she never saw it again. Perplexed by confused voices in the woods, she lost track of the crowd, until the voices suddenly were raised in one loud outcry, followed by the crashing of timber, the splashing of water, a silence, and then a dull, continuous roar. She ran vaguely on in the direction of the reservoir, with her father's injunction still in her mind, until a terrible idea displaced it, and she turned at right angles suddenly, and ran towards the slope leading down to the submerged flat. She had barely left the shelter of the trees behind her before the roar of water seemed to rise at her very feet. She stopped, dazed, bewildered, and horror-stricken, on the edge of the slope. It was the slope no longer, but the bank of the river itself!

Even in the gray light of early morning, and with inexperienced eyes, she saw all too clearly now. The trestle-work had given way; the curving mile of flume, fallen into the stream, and crushed and dammed against the opposite shore, had absolutely turned the whole river through the half-finished ditch and partly excavated mine in its way, a few rods further on to join the old familiar channel. The bank of the river was changed; the flat had become an island, between which and the slope where she stood the

North Fork was rolling its resistless yellow torrent. As she gazed spellbound, a portion of the slope beneath her suddenly seemed to sink and crumble, and was swallowed up in the rushing stream. She heard a cry of warning behind her, but, rooted to the spot by a fearful fascination, she heeded it not. Again there was a sudden disruption, and another part of the slope sank to rise no more; but this time she felt herself seized by the waist and dragged back. It was her father standing by her side.

He was flushed and excited, gazing at the water with a strange exultation.

"Do you see it? Do you know what has happened?" he asked quickly.

"The flume has fallen and turned the river," said Christie hurriedly. "But — have you seen him — is he safe?"

"He — who?" he answered vacantly.

"George Kearney!"

"He is safe," he said impatiently. "But, do you see, Christie? Do you know what this means?"

He pointed with his tremulous hand to the stream before them.

"It means we are ruined," said Christie coldly.

"Nothing of the kind! It means that the river is doing the work of the flume. It is sluicing off the gravel, deepening the ditch, and altering the slope which was the old bend of the river. It will do in ten minutes the work that would take us a year. If we can stop it in time, or control it, we are safe; but if we cannot, it will carry away the bed and deposit with the rest, and we are ruined again."

With a gesture of impotent fury, he dashed away in the direction of an equally excited crowd, that on a point of the slope nearer the island were gesticulating and shouting to a second group of men, who on the opposite shore were clambering on over the choked débris of the flume that had dammed and diverted the current. It was evident that the

same idea had occurred to them, and they were risking their lives in the attempt to set free the impediments. Shocked and indignant as Christie had been at the degrading absorption of material interests at such a moment, the element of danger lifted the labors of these men into heroism, and she began to feel a strange exultation as she watched them. Under the skillful blows of their axes, in a few moments the vast body of drift began to disintegrate, and then to swing round and move towards the old channel. A cheer went up, but as suddenly died away again. An overlapping fringe of wreckage had caught on the point of the island and arrested the whole mass.

The men, who had gained the shore with difficulty, looked back with a cry of despair. But the next moment from among them leaped a figure, alert, buoyant, invincible, and, axe in hand, once more essayed the passage. Springing from timber to timber he at last reached the point of obstruction. A few strokes of the axe were sufficient to clear it; but at the first stroke it was apparent that the striker was also losing his hold upon the shore, and that he must inevitably be carried away with the tossing débris. But this consideration did not seem to affect him; the last blow was struck, and as the freed timbers rolled on, over and over, he boldly plunged into the flood. Christie gave a little cry — her heart had bounded with him; it seemed as if his plunge had splashed the water in her eyes. He did not come to the surface until he had passed the point below where her father stood, and then struggling feebly, as if stunned or disabled by a blow. It seemed to her that he was trying to approach the side of the river where she was. Would he do it? Could she help him? She was alone; he was hidden from the view of the men on the point, and no succor could come from them. There was a fringe of alder nearly opposite their cabin that almost overhung the stream. She ran to it, clutched it with a frantic hand,

and leaning over the boiling water, uttered for the first time his name.

"George!"

As if called to the surface by the magic of her voice, he rose a few yards from her in mid-current, and turned his fading eyes towards the bank. In another moment he would have been swept beyond her reach, but with a supreme effort he turned on one side; the current, striking him sideways, threw him towards the bank, and she caught him by his sleeve. For an instant it seemed as if she would be dragged down with him. For one dangerous moment she did not care, and almost yielded to the spell; but as the rush of water pressed him against the bank, she recovered herself, and managed to lift him beyond its reach. And then she sat down, half fainting, with his white face and damp curls upon her breast.

"George, darling, speak to me! Only one word! Tell me, have I saved you?"

His eyes opened. A faint twinkle of the old days came to them — a boyish smile played upon his lips.

"For yourself — or Jessie?"

She looked around her with a little frightened air. They were alone. There was but one way of sealing those mischievous lips, and she found it!

. . . . . .

"That 's what I allus said, gentlemen," lazily remarked Whiskey Dick, a few weeks later, leaning back against the bar, with his glass in his hand. "'George,' sez I, 'it ain't what you *say* to a fash'nable, high-toned young lady; it 's what you *does* ez makes or breaks you.' And that 's what I sez gin'rally o' things in the Ford. It ain't what Carr and you boys allows to do; it 's the gin'ral average o' things ez *iz* done that gives tone to the hull, and hez brought this yer new luck to you all!"

A SECRET OF TELEGRAPH HILL

I

As Mr. Herbert Bly glanced for the first time at the house which was to be his future abode in San Francisco he was somewhat startled. In that early period of feverish civic improvement the street before it had been repeatedly graded and lowered until the dwelling — originally a pioneer suburban villa perched upon a slope of Telegraph Hill — now stood sixty feet above the sidewalk, superposed like some Swiss châlet on successive galleries built in the sand-hill, and connected by a half-dozen distinct zigzag flights of wooden staircase. Stimulated, however, by the thought that the view from the top would be a fine one, and that existence there would have all the quaint originality of Robinson Crusoe's tree-dwelling, Mr. Bly began cheerfully to mount the steps. It should be premised that, although a recently appointed clerk in a large banking house, Mr. Bly was somewhat youthful and imaginative, and regarded the ascent as part of that "Excelsior" climbing pointed out by a great poet as a praiseworthy function of ambitious youth.

Reaching at last the level of the veranda, he turned to the view. The distant wooded shore of Contra Costa, the tossing whitecaps and dancing sails of the bay between, and the foreground at his feet of wharves and piers, with their reedlike jungles of masts and cordage, made up a bright, if somewhat material, picture. To his right rose the crest of the hill, historic and memorable as the site of the old semaphoric telegraph, the tossing of whose gaunt arms formerly

thrilled the citizens with tidings from the sea. Turning to the house, he recognized the prevailing style of light cottage architecture, although incongruously confined to narrow building plots and the civic regularity of a precise street frontage. Thus a dozen other villas, formerly scattered over the slope, had been laboriously displaced and moved to the rigorous parade line drawn by the street surveyor, no matter how irregular and independent their design and structure. Happily, the few scrub-oaks and low bushes which formed the scant vegetation of this vast sand-dune offered no obstacle and suggested no incongruity. Beside the house before which Mr. Bly now stood, a prolific madeira vine, quickened by the six months' sunshine, had alone survived the displacement of its foundations, and in its untrimmed luxuriance half hid the upper veranda from his view.

Still glowing with his exertion, the young man rang the bell and was admitted into a fair-sized drawing-room, whose tasteful and well-arranged furniture at once prepossessed him. An open piano, a sheet of music carelessly left on the stool, a novel lying face downwards on the table beside a skein of silk, and the distant rustle of a vanished skirt through an inner door, gave a suggestion of refined domesticity to the room that touched the fancy of the homeless and nomadic Bly. He was still enjoying, in half embarrassment, that vague and indescribable atmosphere of a refined woman's habitual presence, when the door opened and the mistress of the house formally presented herself.

She was a faded but still handsome woman. Yet she wore that peculiar long, limp, formless house shawl which in certain phases of Anglo-Saxon spinster and widowhood assumes the functions of the recluse's veil and announces the renunciation of worldly vanities and a resigned indifference to external feminine contour. The most audacious masculine arm would shrink from clasping that shapeless

void in which the flatness of asceticism or the heavings of passion might alike lie buried. She had also in some mysterious way imported into the fresh and pleasant room a certain bombaziny shadow of the past, and a suggestion of that appalling reminiscence known as "better days." Though why it should be always represented by ashen memories, or why better days in the past should be supposed to fix their fitting symbol in depression in the present, Mr. Bly was too young and too preoccupied at the moment to determine. He only knew that he was a little frightened of her, and fixed his gaze with a hopeless fascination on a letter which she somewhat portentously carried under the shawl, and which seemed already to have yellowed in its arctic shade.

"Mr. Carstone has written to me that you would call," said Mrs. Brooks, with languid formality. "Mr. Carstone was a valued friend of my late husband, and I suppose has told you the circumstances — the only circumstances — which admit of my entertaining his proposition of taking anybody, even temporarily, under my roof. The absence of my dear son for six months at Portland, Oregon, enables me to place his room at the disposal of Mr. Carstone's young protégé, who, Mr. Carstone tells me, and I have every reason to believe, is, if perhaps not so seriously inclined nor yet a church communicant, still of a character and reputation not unworthy to follow my dear Tappington in our little family circle as he has at his desk in the bank."

The sensitive Bly, struggling painfully out of an abstraction as to how he was ever to offer the weekly rent of his lodgings to such a remote and respectable person, and also somewhat embarrassed at being appealed to in the third person, here started and bowed.

"The name of Bly is not unfamiliar to me," continued Mrs. Brooks, pointing to a chair and sinking resignedly into another, where her baleful shawl at once assumed the

appearance of a dust-cover; "some of my dearest friends were intimate with the Blys of Philadelphia. They were a branch of the Maryland Blys of the eastern shore, one of whom my Uncle James married. Perhaps you are distantly related?"

Mrs. Brooks was perfectly aware that her visitor was of unknown Western origin, and a poor but clever protégé of the rich banker; but she was one of a certain class of American women who, in the midst of a fierce democracy, are more or less catlike conservators of family pride and lineage, and more or less felinely inconsistent and treacherous to republican principles. Bly, who had just settled in his mind to send her the rent anonymously — as a weekly valentine — recovered himself and his spirits in his usual boyish fashion.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Brooks," he said gayly, "I cannot lay claim to any distinguished relationship, even to that 'Nelly Bly' who, you remember, 'winked her eye when she went to sleep.'" He stopped in consternation. The terrible conviction flashed upon him that this quotation from a popular negro-minstrel song could not possibly be remembered by a lady as refined as his hostess, or even known to her superior son. The conviction was intensified by Mrs. Brooks rising with a smileless face, slightly shedding the possible vulgarity with a shake of her shawl, and remarking that she would show him her son's room, led the way upstairs to the apartment recently vacated by the perfect Tappington.

Preceded by the same distant flutter of unseen skirts in the passage which he had first noticed on entering the drawing-room, and which evidently did not proceed from his companion, whose self-composed cerements would have repressed any such indecorous agitation, Mr. Bly stepped timidly into the room. It was a very pretty apartment, suggesting the same touches of tasteful refinement in its

furniture and appointments, and withal so feminine in its neatness and regularity, that, conscious of his frontier habits and experience, he felt at once repulsively incongruous. "I cannot expect, Mr. Bly," said Mrs. Brooks resignedly, "that you can share my son's extreme sensitiveness to disorder and irregularity; but I must beg you to avoid as much as possible disturbing the arrangement of the bookshelves, which, you observe, comprise his books of serious reference, the Biblical commentaries, and the sermons which were his habitual study. I must beg you to exercise the same care in reference to the valuable offerings from his Sabbath-school scholars which are upon the mantel. The embroidered book-marker, the gift of the young ladies of his Bible class in Dr. Stout's church, is also, you perceive, kept for ornament and affectionate remembrance. The harmonium — even if you are not yourself given to sacred song — I trust you will not find in your way, nor object to my daughter continuing her practice during your daily absence. Thank you. The door you are looking at leads by a flight of steps to the side street."

"A very convenient arrangement," said Bly hopefully, who saw a chance for an occasional unostentatious escape from a too protracted contemplation of Tappington's perfections. "I mean," he added hurriedly, "to avoid disturbing you at night."

"I believe my son had neither the necessity nor desire to use it for that purpose," returned Mrs. Brooks severely; "although he found it sometimes a convenient short cut to church on Sabbath when he was late."

Bly, who in his boyish sensitiveness to external impressions had by this time concluded that a life divided between the past perfections of Tappington and the present renunciations of Mrs. Brooks would be intolerable, and was again abstractedly inventing some delicate excuse for withdrawing without committing himself further, was here sud-

denly attracted by a repetition of the rustling of the unseen skirt. This time it was nearer, and this time it seemed to strike even Mrs. Brooks's remote preoccupation. "My daughter, who is deeply devoted to her brother," she said, slightly raising her voice, "will take upon herself the care of looking after Tappington's precious mementos, and spare you the trouble. Cherry, dear! this way. This is the young gentleman spoken of by Mr. Carstone, your papa's friend. My daughter Cherubina, Mr. Bly."

The fair owner of the rustling skirt, which turned out to be a pretty French print, had appeared at the doorway. She was a tall, slim blonde, with a shy, startled manner, as of a penitent nun who was suffering for some conventual transgression — a resemblance that was heightened by her short-cut hair, that might have been cropped as if for punishment. A certain likeness to her mother suggested that she was qualifying for that saint's ascetic shawl — subject, however, to rebellious intervals, indicated in the occasional sidelong fires of her gray eyes. Yet the vague impression that she knew more of the world than her mother, and that she did not look at all as if her name was Cherubina, struck Bly in the same momentary glance.

"Mr. Bly is naturally pleased with what he has seen of our dear Tappington's appointments; and as I gather from Mr. Carstone's letter that he is anxious to enter at once and make the most of the dear boy's absence, you will see, my dear Cherry, that Ellen has everything ready for him?"

Before the unfortunate Bly could explain or protest the young girl lifted her gray eyes to his. Whether she had perceived and understood his perplexity he could not tell; but the swift shy glance was at once appealing, assuring, and intelligent. She was certainly unlike her mother and brother. Acting with his usual impulsiveness, he forgot his previous resolution, and before he left had engaged to begin his occupation of the room on the following day.

The next afternoon found him installed. Yet, after he had unpacked his modest possessions and put them away, after he had placed his few books on the shelves, where they looked glaringly trivial and frivolous beside the late tenant's severe studies; after he had set out his scanty treasures in the way of photographs and some curious mementos of his wandering life, and then quickly put them back again with a sudden angry pride at exposing them to the unsympathetic incongruity of the other ornaments, he, nevertheless, felt ill at ease. He glanced in vain around the pretty room. It was not the delicately flowered wall-paper; it was not the white and blue muslin window-curtains gracefully tied up with blue and white ribbons; it was not the spotless bed, with its blue and white festooned mosquito-net and flounced valances, and its medallion portrait of an unknown bishop at the back; it was not the few tastefully framed engravings of certain cardinal virtues, "The Rock of Ages," and "The Guardian Angel;" it was not the casts in relief of "Night" and "Morning;" it was certainly not the cosy dimity-covered armchairs and sofa, nor yet the clean-swept polished grate with its cheerful fire sparkling against the chill afternoon sea-fogs without; neither was it the mere feminine suggestion, for that touched a sympathetic chord in his impulsive nature; nor the religious and ascetic influence, for he had occupied a monastic cell in a school of the padres at an old mission, and slept profoundly; — it was none of those, and yet a part of all. Most habitations retain a cast or shell of their previous tenant that, fitting tightly or loosely, is still able to adjust itself to the newcomer; in most occupied apartments there is still a shadowy suggestion of the owner's individuality; there was nothing here that fitted Bly — nor was there either, strange to say, any evidence of the past proprietor in this inhospitality of sensation. It did not strike him at the time that it was this very *lack* of indi-

viduality which made it weird and unreal, that it was strange only because it was *artificial*, and that a *real* Tappington had never inhabited it.

He walked to the window — that never-failing resource of the unquiet mind — and looked out. He was a little surprised to find, that, owing to the grading of the house, the scrub-oaks and bushes of the hill were nearly on the level of his window, as also was the adjoining side street on which his second door actually gave. Opening this, the sudden invasion of the sea-fog and the figure of a pedestrian casually passing along the disused and abandoned pavement not a dozen feet from where he had been comfortably seated, presented such a striking contrast to the studious quiet and cosiness of his secluded apartment that he hurriedly closed the door again with a sense of indiscreet exposure. Returning to the window, he glanced to the left, and found that he was overlooked by the side veranda of another villa in the rear, evidently on its way to take position on the line of the street. Although in actual and deliberate transit on rollers across the back yard and still occulting a part of the view, it remained, after the reckless fashion of the period, inhabited. Certainly, with a door fronting a thoroughfare, and a neighbor gradually approaching him, he would not feel lonely or lack excitement.

He drew his armchair to the fire and tried to realize the all-pervading yet evasive Tappington. There was no portrait of him in the house, and although Mrs. Brooks had said that he "favored" his sister, Bly had, without knowing why, instinctively resented it. He had even timidly asked his employer, and had received the vague reply that he was "good looking enough," and the practical but discomposing retort, "What do you want to know for?" As he really did not know why, the inquiry had dropped. He stared at the monumental crystal inkstand

half full of ink, yet spotless and free from stains, that stood on the table, and tried to picture Tappington daintily dipping into it to thank the fair donors — "daughters of Rebecca." Who were they? and what sort of man would they naturally feel grateful to?

What was that?

He turned to the window, which had just resounded to a slight tap or blow, as if something soft had struck it. With an instinctive suspicion of the propinquity of the adjoining street he rose, but a single glance from the window satisfied him that no missile would have reached it from thence. He scanned the low bushes on the level before him; certainly no one could be hiding there. He lifted his eyes toward the house on the left; the curtains of the nearest window appeared to be drawn suddenly at the same moment. Could it have come from there? Looking down upon the window-ledge, there lay the mysterious missile — a little misshapen ball. He opened the window and took it up. It was a small handkerchief tied into a soft knot, and dampened with water to give it the necessary weight as a projectile.

Was it apparently the trick of a mischievous child? or —

But here a faint knock on the door leading into the hall checked his inquiry. He opened it sharply in his excitement, and was embarrassed to find the daughter of his hostess standing there, shy, startled, and evidently equally embarrassed by his abrupt response.

"Mother only wanted me to ask you if Ellen had put everything to rights," she said, making a step backwards.

"Oh, thank you. Perfectly," said Herbert, with effusion. "Nothing could be better done. In fact" —

"You 're quite sure she has n't forgotten anything? or that there is n't anything you would like changed?" she continued, with her eyes leveled on the floor.

"Nothing, I assure you," he said, looking at her down-

cast lashes. As she still remained motionless, he continued cheerfully, "Would you — would you — care to look round and see?"

"No; I thank you."

There was an awkward pause. He still continued to hold the door open. Suddenly she moved forward with a schoolgirl stride, entered the room, and going to the harmonium, sat down upon the music-stool beside it, slightly bending forward, with one long, slim, white hand on top of the other, resting over her crossed knees.

Herbert was a little puzzled. It was the awkward and brusque act of a very young person, and yet nothing now could be more gentle and self-composed than her figure and attitude.

"Yes," he continued, smilingly; "I am only afraid that I may not be able to live quite up to the neatness and regularity of the example I find here everywhere. You know I am dreadfully careless and not at all orderly. I shudder to think what may happen; but you and your mother, Miss Brooks, I trust, will make up your minds to overlook and forgive a good deal. I shall do my best to be worthy of Mr. Tap — of my predecessor — but even then I am afraid you 'll find me a great bother."

She raised her shy eyelids. The faintest ghost of a long-buried dimple came into her pale cheek as she said softly, to his utter consternation: —

"Rats!"

Had she uttered an oath he could not have been more startled than he was by this choice gem of Western saloon-slang from the pure lips of this Evangeline-like figure before him. He sat gazing at her with a wild hysteric desire to laugh. She lifted her eyes again, swept him with a slightly terrified glance, and said: —

"Tap says you all say that when any one makes-believe politeness to you."

"Oh, your *brother* says that, does he?" said Herbert, laughing.

"Yes, and sometimes 'Old rats.' But," she continued hurriedly, "*he* does n't say it; he says *you* all do. My brother is very particular, and very good. Dr. Stout loves him. He is thought very much of in all Christian circles. That bookmark was given to him by one of his classes."

Every trace of her dimples had vanished. She looked so sweetly grave, and withal so maidenly, sitting there slightly smoothing the lengths of her pink fingers, that Herbert was somewhat embarrassed.

"But I assure you, Miss Brooks, I was not making-believe. I am really very careless, and everything is so proper — I mean so neat and pretty — here, that I" — he stopped, and observing the same backward wandering of her eye as of a filly about to shy, quickly changed the subject. "You have, or are about to have, neighbors?" he said, glancing towards the windows as he recalled the incident of a moment before.

"Yes; and they 're not at all nice people. They are from Pike County, and very queer. They came across the plains in '50. They say 'Stranger;' the men are vulgar, and the girls very forward. Tap forbids my ever going to the window and looking at them. They 're quite what you would call 'off color.'"

Herbert, who did not dare to say that he never would have dreamed of using such an expression in any young girl's presence, was plunged in silent consternation.

"Then your brother does n't approve of them?" he said, at last, awkwardly.

"Oh, not at all. He even talked of having ground glass put in all these windows, only it would make the light bad."

Herbert felt very embarrassed. If the mysterious missile came from these objectionable young persons, it was evi-

dently because they thought they had detected a more accessible and sympathizing individual in the stranger who now occupied the room. He concluded he had better not say anything about it.

Miss Brooks's golden eyelashes were bent towards the floor. "Do you play sacred music, Mr. Bly?" she said, without raising them.

"I am afraid not."

"Perhaps you know only negro-minstrel songs?"

"I am afraid — yes."

"I know one." The dimples faintly came back again. "It 's called 'The Ham-fat Man.' Some day when mother is n't in I 'll play it for you."

Then the dimples fled again, and she immediately looked so distressed that Herbert came to her assistance.

"I suppose your brother taught you that too?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she returned, with her frightened glance; "I only heard him say some people preferred that kind of thing to sacred music, and one day I saw a copy of it in a music-store window in Clay Street, and bought it. Oh no! Tappington did n't teach it to me."

In the pleasant discovery that she was at times independent of her brother's perfections, Herbert smiled, and sympathetically drew a step nearer to her. She rose at once, somewhat primly holding back the sides of her skirt, schoolgirl fashion, with thumb and finger, and her eyes cast down.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Bly."

"Must you go? Good-afternoon."

She walked directly to the open door, looking very tall and stately as she did so, but without turning towards him. When she reached it she lifted her eyes; there was the slightest suggestion of a return of her dimples in the relaxation of her grave little mouth. Then she said, "Good-by, Mr. Bly," and departed.

The skirt of her dress rustled for an instant in the passage. Herbert looked after her. "I wonder if she skipped then — she looks like a girl that might skip at such a time," he said to himself. "How very odd she is — and how simple! But I must pull her up in that slang when I know her better. Fancy her brother telling her *that!* What a pair they must be!" Nevertheless, when he turned back into the room again he forbore going to the window to indulge further curiosity in regard to his wicked neighbors. A certain new feeling of respect to his late companion — and possibly to himself — held him in check. Much as he resented Tappington's perfections, he resented quite as warmly the presumption that he was not quite as perfect, which was implied in that mysterious overture. He glanced at the stool on which she had been sitting with a half-brotherly smile, and put it reverently on one side with a very vivid recollection of her shy maidenly figure. In some mysterious way too the room seemed to have lost its formal strangeness; perhaps it was the touch of individuality — *hers* — that had been wanting? He began thoughtfully to dress himself for his regular dinner at the Poodle Dog Restaurant, and when he left the room he turned back to look once more at the stool where she had sat. Even on his way to that fast and famous café of the period, he felt, for the first time in his thoughtless but lonely life, the gentle security of the home he had left behind him.

II

It was three or four days before he became firmly adjusted to his new quarters. During this time he had met Cherry casually on the staircase, in going or coming, and received her shy greetings; but she had not repeated her visit, nor again alluded to it. He had spent part of a formal evening in the parlor in company with a calling deacon, who, unappalled by the Indian shawl for which the widow

had exchanged her household cerements on such occasions, appeared to Herbert to have remote matrimonial designs, as far at least as a sympathetic deprecation of the vanities of the present, an echoing of her sighs like a modest encore, a preternatural gentility of manner, a vague allusion to the necessity of bearing "one another's burdens," and an everlasting "promise" in store, would seem to imply. To Herbert's vivid imagination, a discussion on the doctrinal points of last Sabbath's sermon was fraught with delicate suggestion; and an acceptance by the widow of an appointment to attend the Wednesday evening "Lectures" had all the shy reluctant yielding of a granted rendezvous. Oddly enough, the more formal attitude seemed to be reserved for the young people, who, in the suggestive atmosphere of this spiritual flirtation, alone appeared to preserve the proprieties, and, to some extent, decorously chaperon their elders. Herbert gravely turned the leaves of Cherry's music while she played and sang one or two discreet but depressing songs expressive of her unalterable but proper devotion to her mother's clock, her father's armchair, and her aunt's Bible; and Herbert joined somewhat boyishly in the soul-subduing refrain. Only once he ventured to suggest in a whisper that he would like to add *her* music-stool to the adorable inventory; but he was met by such a disturbed and terrified look that he desisted. "Another night of this wild and reckless dissipation will finish me," he said lugubriously to himself when he reached the solitude of his room. "I wonder how many times a week I 'd have to help the girl play the spiritual gooseberry downstairs before we could have any fun ourselves?"

Here the sound of distant laughter, interspersed with vivacious feminine shrieks, came through the open window. He glanced between the curtains. His neighbor's house was brilliantly lit, and the shadows of a few romping figures were chasing each other across the muslin shades of

the windows. The objectionable young women were evidently enjoying themselves. In some conditions of the mind there is a certain exasperation in the spectacle of unmeaning enjoyment, and he shut the window sharply. At the same moment some one knocked at his door.

It was Miss Brooks, who had just come upstairs.

"Will you please let me have my music-stool?"

He stared at her a moment in surprise, then recovering himself, said, "Yes, certainly," and brought the stool. For an instant he was tempted to ask why she wanted it, but his pride forbade him.

"Thank you. Good-night."

"Good-night!"

"I hope it was n't in your way?"

"Not at all."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night."

She vanished. Herbert was perplexed. Between young ladies whose naïve exuberance impelled them to throw handkerchiefs at this window and young ladies whose equally naïve modesty demanded the withdrawal from his bedroom of a chair on which they had once sat, his lot seemed to have fallen in a troubled locality. Yet a day or two later he heard Cherry practicing on the harmonium as he was ascending the stairs on his return from business; she had departed before he entered the room, but had left the music-stool behind her. It was not again removed.

One Sunday, the second or third of his tenancy, when Cherry and her mother were at church, and he had finished some work that he had brought from the bank, his former restlessness and sense of strangeness returned. The regular afternoon fog had thickened early, and driving him back from a cheerless, chilly ramble on the hill, had left him still more depressed and solitary. In sheer desperation he moved some of the furniture, and changed the disposition

of several smaller ornaments. Growing bolder, he even attacked the sacred shelf devoted to Tappington's serious literature and moral studies. At first glance the book of sermons looked suspiciously fresh and new for a volume of habitual reference, but its leaves were carefully cut, and contained one or two bookmarks. It was only another evidence of that perfect youth's care and neatness. As he was replacing it he noticed a small object folded in white paper at the back of the shelf. To put the book back into its former position it was necessary to take this out. He did so, but its contents slid from his fingers and the paper to the floor. To his utter consternation, looking down he saw a pack of playing-cards strewn at his feet!

He hurriedly picked them up. They were worn and slippery from use, and exhaled a faint odor of tobacco. Had they been left there by some temporary visitor unknown to Tappington and his family, or had they been hastily hidden by a servant? Yet they were of a make and texture superior to those that a servant would possess; looking at them carefully, he recognized them to be of a quality used by the better-class gamblers. Restoring them carefully to their former position, he was tempted to take out the other volumes, and was rewarded with the further discovery of a small box of ivory counters, known as "poker-chips." It was really very extraordinary! It was quite the *cache* of some habitual gambler. Herbert smiled grimly at the irreverent incongruity of the hiding-place selected by its unknown and mysterious owner, and amused himself by fancying the horror of his sainted predecessor had *he* made the discovery. He determined to replace them, and to put some mark upon the volumes before them in order to detect any future disturbance of them in his absence.

Ought he not to take Miss Brooks in his confidence? Or should he say nothing about it at present, and trust to chance to discover the sacrilegious hider? Could it pos-

sibly be Cherry herself, guilty of the same innocent curiosity that had impelled her to buy the "Ham-fat Man"? Preposterous! Besides, the cards had been used, and she could not play poker alone!

He watched the rolling fog extinguish the line of Russian Hill, the last bit of far perspective from his window. He glanced at his neighbor's veranda, already dripping with moisture; the windows were blank; he remembered to have heard the girls giggling in passing down the side street on their way to church, and had noticed from behind his own curtains that one was rather pretty. This led him to think of Cherry again, and to recall the quaint yet melancholy grace of her figure as she sat on the stool opposite. Why had she withdrawn it so abruptly; did she consider his jesting allusion to it indecorous and presuming? Had he really meant it seriously; and was he beginning to think too much about her? Would she ever come again? How nice it would be if she returned from church alone early, and they could have a comfortable chat together here! Would she sing the "Ham-fat Man" for him? Would the dimples come back if she did? Should he ever know more of this quaint repressed side of her nature? After all, what a dear, graceful, tantalizing, lovable creature she was! Ought he not at all hazards try to know her better? Might it not be here that he would find a perfect realization of his boyish dreams, and in *her* all that — what nonsense he was thinking!

Suddenly Herbert was startled by the sound of a light but hurried foot upon the wooden outer step of his second door, and the quick but ineffective turning of the door-handle. He started to his feet, his mind still filled with a vision of Cherry. Then he as suddenly remembered that he had locked the door on going out, putting the key in his overcoat pocket. He had returned by the front door, and his overcoat was now hanging in the lower hall.

The door again rattled impetuously. Then it was supplemented by a female voice in a hurried whisper: "Open quick, can't you? do hurry!"

He was confounded. The voice was authoritative, not unmusical; but it was *not* Cherry's. Nevertheless he called out quickly, "One moment, please, and I 'll get the key!" dashed downstairs and up again, breathlessly unlocked the door and threw it open.

Nobody was there!

He ran out into the street. On one side it terminated abruptly on the cliff on which his dwelling was perched; on the other, it descended more gradually into the next thoroughfare; but up and down the street, on either hand, no one was to be seen. A slightly superstitious feeling for an instant crept over him. Then he reflected that the mysterious visitor could in the interval of his getting the key have easily slipped down the steps of the cliff or entered the shrubbery of one of the adjacent houses. But why had she not waited? And what did she want? As he reëntered his door he mechanically raised his eyes to the windows of his neighbor's. This time he certainly was not mistaken. The two amused, mischievous faces that suddenly disappeared behind the curtain as he looked up showed that the incident had not been unwitnessed. Yet it was impossible that it could have been either of *them*. Their house was only accessible by a long détour. It might have been the trick of a confederate; but the tone of half familiarity and half entreaty in the unseen visitor's voice dispelled the idea of any collusion. He entered the room and closed the door angrily. A grim smile stole over his face as he glanced around at the dainty saintlike appointments of the absent Tappington, and thought what that irreproachable young man would have said to the indecorous intrusion, even though it had been a mistake. Would those shameless Pike County girls have dared to laugh at *him?*

But he was again puzzled to know why he himself should have been selected for this singular experience. Why was *he* considered fair game for these girls? And, for the matter of that, now that he reflected upon it, why had even this gentle, refined, and melancholy Cherry thought it necessary to talk slang to *him* on their first acquaintance, and offer to sing him the "Ham-fat Man"? It was true he had been a little gay, but never dissipated. Of course he was not a saint, like Tappington — oh, *that* was it! He believed he understood it now. He was suffering from that extravagant conception of what worldliness consists of, so common to very good people with no knowledge of the world. Compared to Tappington he was in their eyes, of course, a rake and a roué. The explanation pleased him. He would not keep it to himself. He would gain Cherry's confidence and enlist her sympathies. Her gentle nature would revolt at this injustice to their lonely lodger. She would see that there were degrees of goodness besides her brother's. She would perhaps sit on that stool again and *not* sing the "Ham-fat Man."

A day or two afterwards the opportunity seemed offered to him. As he was coming home and ascending the long hilly street, his eye was taken by a tall graceful figure just preceding him. It was she. He had never before seen her in the street and was now struck with her ladylike bearing and the grave superiority of her perfectly simple attire. In a thoroughfare haunted by handsome women and striking toilets, the refined grace of her mourning costume, and a certain stateliness that gave her the look of a young widow, was a contrast that evidently attracted others than himself. It was with an odd mingling of pride and jealousy that he watched the admiring yet respectful glances of the passers-by, some of whom turned to look again, and one or two to retrace their steps and follow her at a decorous distance. This caused him to quicken

his own pace, with a new anxiety and a remorseful sense of wasted opportunity. What a booby he had been, not to have made more of his contiguity to this charming girl — to have been frightened at the naïve decorum of her maidenly instincts! He reached her side, and raised his hat with a trepidation at her new-found graces — with a boldness that was defiant of her other admirers. She blushed slightly.

"I thought you 'd overtake me before," she said naïvely. "*I* saw *you* ever so long ago."

He stammered, with an equal simplicity, that he had not dared to.

She looked a little frightened again, and then said hurriedly: "I only thought that I would meet you on Montgomery Street, and we would walk home together. I don't like to go out alone, and mother cannot always go with me. Tappington never cared to take me out — I don't know why. I think he did n't like the people staring and stopping us. But they stare more — don't you think? — when one is alone. So I thought if you were coming straight home we might come together — unless you have something else to do?"

Herbert impulsively reiterated his joy at meeting her, and averred that no other engagement, either of business or pleasure, could or would stand in his way. Looking up, however, it was with some consternation that he saw they were already within a block of the house.

"Suppose we take a turn around the hill and come back by the old street down the steps?" he suggested earnestly.

The next moment he regretted it. The frightened look returned to her eyes; her face became melancholy and formal again.

"No!" she said quickly. "That would be taking a walk with you like these young girls and their young men on Saturdays. That 's what Ellen does with the butcher's

boy on Sundays. Tappington often used to meet them. Doing the 'Come, Philanders,' as he says you call it."

It struck Herbert that the didactic Tappington's method of inculcating a horror of slang in his sister's breast was open to some objection; but they were already on the steps of their house, and he was too much mortified at the reception of his last unhappy suggestion to make the confidential disclosure he had intended, even if there had still been time.

"There 's mother waiting for me," she said, after an awkward pause, pointing to the figure of Mrs. Brooks dimly outlined on the veranda. "I suppose she was beginning to be worried about my being out alone. She 'll be so glad I met you." It did n't appear to Herbert, however, that Mrs. Brooks exhibited any extravagant joy over the occurrence, and she almost instantly retired with her daughter into the sitting-room, linking her arm in Cherry's, and, as it were, empanoplying her with her own invulnerable shawl. Herbert went to his room more dissatisfied with himself than ever.

Two or three days elapsed without his seeing Cherry; even the well-known rustle of her skirt in the passage was missing. On the third evening he resolved to bear the formal terrors of the drawing-room again, and stumbled upon a decorous party consisting of Mrs. Brooks, the deacon, and the pastor's wife — but not Cherry. It struck him on entering that the momentary awkwardness of the company and the formal beginning of a new topic indicated that *he* had been the subject of their previous conversation. In this idea he continued, through that vague spirit of opposition which attacks impulsive people in such circumstances, to generally disagree with them on all subjects, and to exaggerate what he chose to believe they thought objectionable in him. He did not remain long; but learned in that brief interval that Cherry had gone to visit a friend

in Contra Costa, and would be absent a fortnight; and he was conscious that the information was conveyed to him with a peculiar significance.

The result of which was only to intensify his interest in the absent Cherry, and for a week to plunge him in a sea of conflicting doubts and resolutions. At one time he thought seriously of demanding an explanation from Mrs. Brooks, and of confiding to her — as he had intended to do to Cherry — his fears that his character had been misinterpreted, and his reasons for believing so. But here he was met by the difficulty of formulating what he wished to have explained, and some doubts as to whether his confidences were prudent. At another time he contemplated a serious imitation of Tappington's perfections, a renunciation of the world, and an entire change in his habits. He would go regularly to church — *her* church, and take up Tappington's desolate Bible class. But here the torturing doubt arose whether a young lady who betrayed a certain secular curiosity, and who had evidently depended upon her brother for a knowledge of the world, would entirely like it. At times he thought of giving up the room and abandoning forever this doubly dangerous proximity; but here again he was deterred by the difficulty of giving a satisfactory reason to his employer, who had procured it as a favor. His passion — for such he began to fear it to be — led him once to the extravagance of asking a day's holiday from the bank, which he vaguely spent in the streets of Oakland in the hope of accidentally meeting the exiled Cherry.

III

The fortnight slowly passed. She returned, but he did not see her. She was always out or engaged in her room with some female friend when Herbert was at home. This was singular, as she had never appeared to him as a young

girl who was fond of visiting or had ever affected female friendships. In fact, there was little doubt now that, wittingly or unwittingly, she was avoiding him.

He was moodily sitting by the fire one evening, having returned early from dinner. In reply to his habitual but affectedly careless inquiry, Ellen had told him that Mrs. Brooks was confined to her room by a slight headache, and that Miss Brooks was out. He was trying to read, and listening to the wind that occasionally rattled the casement and caused the solitary gas-lamp that was visible in the side street to flicker and leap wildly. Suddenly he heard the same footfall upon his outer step and a light tap at the door. Determined this time to solve the mystery, he sprang to his feet and ran to the door; but to his anger and astonishment it was locked and the key was gone. Yet he was positive that *he* had not taken it out.

The tap was timidly repeated. In desperation he called out, "Please don't go away yet. The key is gone; but I'll find it in a moment." Nevertheless he was at his wits' end.

There was a hesitating pause and then the sound of a key cautiously thrust into the lock. It turned; the door opened, and a tall figure, whose face and form were completely hidden in a veil and long gray shawl, quickly glided into the room and closed the door behind it. Then it suddenly raised its arms, the shawl was parted, the veil fell aside, and Cherry stood before him!

Her face was quite pale. Her eyes, usually downcast, frightened, or coldly clear, were bright and beautiful with excitement. The dimples were faintly there, although the smile was sad and half hysterical. She remained standing, erect and tall, her arms dropped at her side, holding the veil and shawl that still depended from her shoulders.

"So — I've caught you!" she said, with a strange little laugh. "Oh yes. 'Please don't go away yet. I'll

get the key in a moment,' " she continued, mimicking his recent utterance.

He could only stammer, "Miss Brooks — then it was *you?*"

"Yes; and you thought it was *she*, did n't you? Well, and you 're caught! I did n't believe it; I would n't believe it when they said it. I determined to find it out myself. And I have; and it 's true."

Unable to determine whether she was serious or jesting, and conscious only of his delight at seeing her again, he advanced impulsively. But her expression instantly changed: she became at once stiff and schoolgirlishly formal, and stepped back towards the door.

"Don't come near me, or I 'll go," she said quickly, with her hand upon the lock.

"But not before you tell me what you mean," he said, half laughingly, half earnestly. "Who is *she?* and what would n't you have believed? For upon my honor, Miss Brooks, I don't know what you are talking about."

His evident frankness and truthful manner appeared to puzzle her. "You mean to say you were expecting no one?" she said sharply.

"I assure you I was not."

"And — and no woman was ever here — at that door?"

He hesitated. "Not to-night — not for a long time; not since you returned from Oakland."

"Then there *was* one?"

"I believe so."

"You *believe* — you don't *know?*"

"I believed it was a woman from her voice; for the door was locked, and the key was downstairs. When I fetched it and opened the door, she — or whoever it was — was gone."

"And that 's why you said so imploringly, just now, 'Please don't go away yet'? You see, I 've caught you. Ah! I don't wonder you blush!"

If he had, his cheeks had caught fire from her brilliant eyes and the extravagantly affected sternness — as of a schoolgirl monitor — in her animated face. Certainly he had never seen such a transformation.

"Yes; but, you see, I wanted to know who the intruder was," he said, smiling at his own embarrassment.

"You did — well, perhaps *that* will tell you? It was found under your door before I went away." She suddenly produced from her pocket a folded paper and handed it to him. It was a misspelt scrawl, and ran as follows: —

"Why are you so cruel? Why do you keep me dansing on the stepps before them gurls at the windows? Was it that stuck-up Saint, Miss Brooks, that you were afraid of, my deer? Oh, you faithless trater! Wait till I ketch you! I 'll tear your eyes out and hern!"

It did not require great penetration for Herbert to be instantly convinced that the writer of this vulgar epistle and the owner of the unknown voice were two very different individuals. The note was evidently a trick. A suspicion of its perpetrators flashed upon him.

"Whoever the woman was, it was not she who wrote the note," he said positively. "Somebody must have seen her at the door. I remember now that those girls — your neighbors — were watching me from their window when I came out. Depend upon it, that letter comes from them."

Cherry's eyes opened widely with a sudden childlike perception, and then shyly dropped. "Yes," she said slowly, "they *did* watch you. They know it, for it was they who made it the talk of the neighborhood, and that 's how it came to mother's ears." She stopped, and with a frightened look, stepped back towards the door again.

"Then *that* was why your mother" —

"Oh yes," interrupted Cherry quickly. "That was why

I went over to Oakland, and why mother forbade my walking with you again, and why she had a talk with friends about your conduct, and why she came near telling Mr. Carstone all about it until I stopped her." She checked herself — he could hardly believe his eyes — the pale, nun-like girl was absolutely blushing.

"I thank you, Miss Brooks," he said gravely, "for your thoughtfulness, although I hope I could have still proven my innocence to Mr. Carstone, even if some unknown woman tried my door by mistake, and was seen doing it. But I am pained to think that *you* could have believed me capable of so wanton and absurd an impropriety — and such a gross disrespect to your mother's house."

"But," said Cherry, with childlike *naïveté*, "you know *you* don't think anything of such things, and that 's what I told mother."

"You told your mother *that?*"

"Oh yes — I told her Tappington says it 's quite common with young men. Please don't laugh — for it 's very dreadful. Tappington did n't laugh when he told it to me as a warning. He was shocked."

"But, my dear Miss Brooks" —

"There — now you 're angry — and that 's as bad. Are you sure you did n't know that woman?"

"Positive!"

"Yet you seemed very anxious just now that she should wait till you opened the door."

"That was perfectly natural."

"I don't think it was natural at all."

"But — according to Tappington" —

"Because my brother is very good you need not make fun of him."

"I assure you I have no such intention. But what more can I say? I give you my word that I don't know who that unlucky woman was. No doubt she may have been

some nearsighted neighbor who had mistaken the house, and I dare say was as thoroughly astonished at my voice as I was at hers. Can I say more? Is it necessary for me to swear that since I have been here no woman has ever entered that door — but" —

"But who?"

"Yourself."

"I know what you mean," she said hurriedly, with her old frightened look, gliding to the outer door. "It 's shameful what I 've done. But I only did it because — because I had faith in you, and did n't believe what they said was true." She had already turned the lock. There were tears in her pretty eyes.

"Stop," said Herbert gently. He walked slowly towards her, and within reach of her frightened figure stopped with the timid respect of a mature and genuine passion. "You must not be seen going out of that door," he said gravely. "You must let me go first, and when I am gone, lock the door again and go through the hall to your own room. No one must know that I was in the house when you came in at that door. Good-night."

Without offering his hand he lifted his eyes to her face. The dimples were all there — and something else. He bowed and passed out.

Ten minutes later he ostentatiously returned to the house by the front door, and proceeded up the stairs to his own room. As he cast a glance around he saw that the music-stool had been moved before the fire, evidently with the view of attracting his attention. Lying upon it, carefully folded, was the veil that she had worn. There could be no doubt that it was left there purposely. With a smile at this strange girl's last characteristic act of timid but compromising recklessness, after all his precautions, he raised it tenderly to his lips, and then hastened to hide it from the reach of vulgar eyes. But had Cherry known that its

temporary resting-place that night was under his pillow she might have doubted his superior caution.

When he returned from the bank the next afternoon, Cherry rapped ostentatiously at his door. "Mother wishes me to ask you," she began, with a certain prim formality, which nevertheless did not preclude dimples, "if you would give us the pleasure of your company at our Church Festival to-night? There will be a concert and a collation. You could accompany us there if you cared. Our friends and Tappington's would be so glad to see you, and Dr. Stout would be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Certainly!" said Herbert, delighted and yet astounded. "Then," he added in a lower voice, "your mother no longer believes me so dreadfully culpable?"

"Oh no," said Cherry in a hurried whisper, glancing up and down the passage; "I 've been talking to her about it, and she is satisfied that it is all a jealous trick and slander of these neighbors. Why, I told her that they had even said that *I* was that mysterious woman; that I came that way to you because she had forbidden my seeing you openly."

"What! You dared say that?"

"Yes; don't you see? Suppose they said they ***had*** seen me coming in last night — *that* answers it," she said triumphantly.

"Oh, it does?" he said vacantly.

"Perfectly. Sc you see she 's convinced that she ought to put you on the same footing as Tappington, before everybody; and then there won't be any trouble. You 'll come, won't you? It won't be so *very* good. And then, I 've told mother that as there have been so many street-fights, and so much talk about the Vigilance Committee lately, I ought to have somebody for an escort when I am coming home. And if you 're known, you see, as one of *us*, there 'll be no harm in you 're meeting me."

"Thank you," he said, extending his hand gratefully.

Her fingers rested a moment in his. "Where did you put it?" she said demurely.

"It? Oh! *it 's* all safe," he said quickly, but somewhat vaguely.

"But I don't call the upper drawer of your bureau safe," she returned poutingly, "where *everybody* can go. So you 'll find it *now* inside the harmonium, on the keyboard."

"Oh, thank you."

"It 's quite natural to have left it there *accidentally* — is n't it?" she said imploringly, assisted by all her dimples. Alas, she had forgotten that he was still holding her hand. Consequently, she had not time to snatch it away and vanish, with a stifled little cry, before it had been pressed two or three times to his lips. A little ashamed of his own boldness, Herbert remained for a few moments in the doorway listening, and looking uneasily down the dark passage. Presently a slight sound came over the fanlight of Cherry's room. Could he believe his ears? The saintlike Cherry — no doubt tutored, for example's sake, by the perfect Tappington — was softly whistling.

In this simple fashion the first pages of this little idyl were quietly turned. The book might have been closed or laid aside even then. But it so chanced that Cherry was an unconscious prophet; and presently it actually became a prudential necessity for her to have a masculine escort when she walked out. For a growing state of lawlessness and crime culminated one day the deep tocsin of the Vigilance Committee, and at its stroke fifty thousand peaceful men, reverting to the first principles of social safety, sprang to arms, assembled at their quarters, or patrolled the streets. In another hour the city of San Francisco was in the hands of a mob — the most peaceful, orderly, well organized, and temperate the world had ever known, and yet in concep-

tion as lawless, autocratic, and imperious as the conditions it opposed.

IV

Herbert, enrolled in the same section with his employer and one or two fellow clerks, had participated in the meetings of the committee with the light heartedness and irresponsibility of youth, regretting only the loss of his usual walk with Cherry and the hours that kept him from her house. He was returning from a protracted meeting one night, when the number of arrests and searching for proscribed and suspected characters had been so large as to induce fears of organized resistance and rescue, and on reaching the foot of the hill found it already so late, that to avoid disturbing the family he resolved to enter his room directly by the door in the side street. On inserting his key in the lock it met with some resisting obstacle, which, however, yielded and apparently dropped on the mat inside. Opening the door and stepping into the perfectly dark apartment, he trod upon this object, which proved to be another key. The family must have procured it for their convenience during his absence, and after locking the door had carelessly left it in the lock. It was lucky that it had yielded so readily.

The fire had gone out. He closed the door and lit the gas, and after taking off his overcoat moved to the door leading into the passage to listen if anybody was still stirring. To his utter astonishment he found it locked. What was more remarkable — the key was also *inside!* An inexplicable feeling took possession of him. He glanced suddenly around the room, and then his eye fell upon the bed. Lying there, stretched at full length, was the recumbent figure of a man.

He was apparently in the profound sleep of utter exhaustion. The attitude of his limbs and the order of his dress — of which only his collar and cravat had been loosened —

showed that sleep must have overtaken him almost instantly. In fact, the bed was scarcely disturbed beyond the actual impress of his figure. He seemed to be a handsome, matured man of about forty; his dark straight hair was a little thinned over the temples, although his long heavy mustache was still youthful and virgin. His clothes, which were elegantly cut and of finer material than that in ordinary use, the delicacy and neatness of his linen, the whiteness of his hands, and, more particularly, a certain dissipated pallor of complexion and lines of recklessness on the brow and cheek, indicated to Herbert that the man before him was one of that desperate and suspected class — some of whose proscribed members he had been hunting — the professional gambler!

Possibly the magnetism of Herbert's intent and astonished gaze affected him. He moved slightly, half opened his eyes, said "Halloo, Tap," rubbed them again, wholly opened them, fixed them with a lazy stare on Herbert, and said: —

"Now, who the devil are you?"

"I think *I* have the right to ask that question, considering that this is my room," said Herbert sharply.

"*Your* room?"

"Yes!"

The stranger half raised himself on his elbow, glanced round the room, settled himself slowly back on the pillows, with his hands clasped lightly behind his head, dropped his eyelids, smiled, and said: —

"Rats!"

"What?" demanded Herbert, with a resentful sense of sacrilege to Cherry's virgin slang.

"Well, old rats then! D' ye think I don't know this shebang. Look here, Johnny, what are you putting on all this side for, eh? What 's your little game? Where 's Tappington?"

"If you mean Mr. Brooks, the son of this house, who formerly lived in this room," replied Herbert, with a formal precision intended to show a doubt of the stranger's knowledge of Tappington, "you ought to know that he has left town."

"Left town!" echoed the stranger, raising himself again. "Oh, I see! getting rather too warm for him here? Humph! I ought to have thought of that. Well, you know, he *did* take mighty big risks, anyway!" He was silent a moment, with his brows knit and a rather dangerous expression in his handsome face. "So some d—d hound gave him away — eh?"

"I had n't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Brooks except by reputation, as the respected son of the lady upon whose house you have just intruded," said Herbert frigidly, yet with a creeping consciousness of some unpleasant revelation.

The stranger stared at him for a moment, again looked carefully round the room, and then suddenly dropped his head back on the pillow, and with his white hands over his eyes and mouth tried to restrain a spasm of silent laughter. After an effort he succeeded, wiped his moist eyes, and sat up.

"So you did n't know Tappington, eh?" he said, lazily buttoning his collar.

"No."

"No more do I."

He retied his cravat, yawned, rose, shook himself perfectly neat again, and going to Herbert's dressing-table quietly took up a brush and began to lightly brush himself, occasionally turning to the window to glance out. Presently he turned to Herbert and said: —

"Well, Johnny, what 's your name?"

"I am Herbert Bly, of Carstone's Bank."

"So, and a member of this same Vigilance Committee, I reckon," he continued.

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Bly, I owe you an apology for coming here, and some thanks for the only sleep I 've had in forty-eight hours. I struck this old shebang at about ten o'clock, and it 's now two, so I reckon I 've put in about four hours' square sleep. Now, look here." He beckoned Herbert towards the window. "Do you see those three men standing under that gaslight? Well, they 're part of a gang of Vigilantes who 've hunted me to the hill, and are waiting to see me come out of the bushes, where they reckon I 'm hiding. Go to them and say that I 'm here! Tell them you 've got Gentleman George — George Dornton, the man they 've been hunting for a week — in this room. I promise you I won't stir, nor kick up a row, when they 've come. Do it, and Carstone, if he 's a square man, will raise your salary for it, and promote you." He yawned slightly, and then slowly looking around him, drew the easy-chair towards him and dropped comfortably in it, gazing at the astounded and motionless Herbert with a lazy smile.

"You 're wondering what my little game is, Johnny, ain't you? Well, I 'll tell you. What with being hunted from pillar to post, putting my old pards to no end of trouble, and then slipping up on it whenever I think I 've got a sure thing like this," — he cast an almost affectionate glance at the bed, — "I 've come to the conclusion that it 's played out, and I might as well hand in my checks. It 's only a question of my being *run out* of 'Frisco, or hiding until I can *slip out* myself; and I 've reckoned I might as well give them the trouble and expense of transportation. And if I can put a good thing in your way in doing it — why, it will sort of make things square with you for the fuss I 've given you."

Even in the stupefaction and helplessness of knowing that the man before him was the notorious duelist and

gambler George Dornton, one of the first marked for deportation by the Vigilance Committee, Herbert recognized all he had heard of his invincible coolness, courage, and almost philosophic fatalism. For an instant his youthful imagination checked even his indignation. When he recovered himself he said with rising color and boyish vehemence: —

"Whoever *you* may be, I am neither a police officer nor a spy. You have no right to insult me by supposing that I would profit by the mistake that made you my guest, or that I would refuse you the sanctuary of the roof that covers your insult as well as your blunder."

The stranger gazed at him with an amused expression, and then rose and stretched out his hand.

"Shake, Mr. Bly! You 're the only man that ever kicked George Dornton when he deserved it. Good-night!" He took his hat and walked to the door.

"Stop!" said Herbert impulsively; "the night is already far gone; go back and finish your sleep."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

The stranger turned, walked back to the bed, unfastening his coat and collar as he did so, and laid himself down in the attitude of a moment before.

"I will call you in the morning," continued Herbert. "By that time," — he hesitated, — "by that time your pursuers may have given up their search. One word more. You will be frank with me?"

"Go on."

"Tappington and you are — friends?"

"Well — yes."

"His mother and sister know nothing of this?"

"I reckon he did n't boast of it. *I* did n't. Is that all?" sleepily.

"Yes."

"Don't *you* worry about *him*. Good-night."

"Good-night."

But even at that moment George Dornton had dropped off in a quiet, peaceful sleep.

Bly turned down the light, and drawing his easy-chair to the window, dropped into it in bewildering reflection. This then was the secret — unknown to mother and daughter — unsuspected by all! This was the double life of Tappington, half revealed in his flirtation with the neighbors, in the hidden cards behind the books, in the mysterious visitor — still unaccounted for — and now wholly exploded by this sleeping confederate, for whom, somehow, Herbert felt the greatest sympathy! What was to be done? What should he say to Cherry — to her mother — to Mr. Carstone? Yet he had felt he had done right. From time to time he turned to the motionless recumbent shadow on the bed and listened to its slow and peaceful respiration. Apart from that undefinable attraction which all original natures have for each other, the thrice-blessed mystery of protection of the helpless, for the first time in his life, seemed to dawn upon him through that night.

Nevertheless, the actual dawn came slowly. Twice he nodded and awoke quickly with a start. The third time it was day. The street-lamps were extinguished, and with them the moving, restless watchers seemed also to have vanished. Suddenly a formal deliberate rapping at the door leading to the hall startled him to his feet.

It must be Ellen. So much the better; he could quickly get rid of her. He glanced at the bed; Dornton slept on undisturbed. He unlocked the door cautiously, and instinctively fell back before the erect, shawled, and decorous figure of Mrs. Brooks. But an utterly new resolution and excitement had supplanted the habitual resignation of her handsome features, and given them an angry sparkle of expression.

Recollecting himself, he instantly stepped forward into the passage, drawing to the door behind him, as she, with equal celerity, opposed it with her hand.

"Mr. Bly," she said deliberately, "Ellen has just told me that your voice has been heard in conversation with some one in this room late last night. Up to this moment I have foolishly allowed my daughter to persuade me that certain infamous scandals regarding your conduct here were false. I must ask you as a gentleman to let me pass now and satisfy myself."

"But, my dear madam, one moment. Let me first explain — I beg" — stammered Herbert, with a half-hysterical laugh. "I assure you a gentleman friend" —

But she had pushed him aside and entered precipitately. With a quick feminine glance round the room she turned to the bed, and then halted in overwhelming confusion.

"It 's a friend," said Herbert in a hasty whisper. "A friend of mine who returned with me late, and whom, on account of the disturbed state of the streets, I induced to stay here all night. He was so tired that I have not had the heart to disturb him yet."

"Oh, pray don't! — I beg" — said Mrs. Brooks, with a certain youthful vivacity, but still gazing at the stranger's handsome features as she slowly retreated. "Not for worlds!"

Herbert was relieved; she was actually blushing.

"You see, it was quite unpremeditated, I assure you. We came in together," whispered Herbert, leading her to the door, "and I" —

"Don't believe a word of it, madam," said a lazy voice from the bed, as the stranger leisurely raised himself upright, putting the last finishing touch to his cravat as he shook himself neat again. "I 'm an utter stranger to him, and he knows it. He found me here, hiding from the Vigilantes, who were chasing me on the hill. I got

in at that door, which happened to be unlocked. He let me stay because he was a gentleman — and — I was n't. I beg your pardon, madam, for having interrupted him before you; but it was a little rough to have him lie on *my* account when he was n't the kind of man to lie on his *own*. You 'll forgive him — won't you, please? — and, as I 'm taking myself off now, perhaps you 'll overlook *my* intrusion too."

It was impossible to convey the lazy frankness of this speech, the charming smile with which it was accompanied, or the easy yet deferential manner with which, taking up his hat, he bowed to Mrs. Brooks as he advanced toward the door.

"But," said Mrs. Brooks, hurriedly glancing from Herbert to the stranger, "it must be the Vigilantes who are now hanging about the street. Ellen saw them from her window, and thought they were *your* friends, Mr. Bly. This gentleman — your friend" — she had become a little confused in her novel excitement — "really ought not to go out now. It would be madness."

"If you would n't mind his remaining a little longer, it certainly would be safer," said Herbert, with wondering gratitude.

"I certainly should n't consent to his leaving my house now," said Mrs. Brooks, with dignity; "and if you would n't mind calling Cherry here, Mr. Bly — she 's in the dining-room — and then showing yourself for a moment in the street and finding out what they wanted, it would be the best thing to do."

Herbert flew downstairs; in a few hurried words he gave the same explanation to the astounded Cherry that he had given to her mother, with the mischievous addition that Mrs. Brooks's unjust suspicions had precipitated her into becoming an amicable accomplice, and then ran out into the street. Here he ascertained from one of the Vigi-

lantes, whom he knew, that they were really seeking Dornton; but that, concluding that the fugitive had already escaped to the wharves, they expected to withdraw their surveillance at noon. Somewhat relieved, he hastened back, to find the stranger calmly seated on the sofa in the parlor with the same air of frank indifference, lazily relating the incidents of his flight to the two women, who were listening with every expression of sympathy and interest. "Poor fellow!" said Cherry, taking the astonished Bly aside into the hall, "I don't believe he 's half as bad as *they* say he is — or as even *he* makes himself out to be. But *did* you notice mother?"

Herbert, a little dazed, and, it must be confessed, a trifle uneasy at this ready acceptance of the stranger, abstractedly said he had not.

"Why, it 's the most ridiculous thing. She 's actually going round *without her shawl*, and does n't seem to know it."

V

When Herbert finally reached the bank that morning he was still in a state of doubt and perplexity. He had parted with his grateful visitor, whose safety in a few hours seemed assured, but without the least further revelation or actual allusion to anything antecedent to his selecting Tappington's room as refuge. More than that, Herbert was convinced from his manner that he had no intention of making a confidante of Mrs. Brooks, and this convinced him that Dornton's previous relations with Tappington were not only utterly inconsistent with that young man's decorous reputation, but were unsuspected by the family. The stranger's familiar knowledge of the room, his mysterious allusions to the "risks" Tappington had taken, and his sudden silence on the discovery of Bly's ignorance of the whole affair — all pointed to some secret that, innocent or not, was more or less perilous, not only to the son but to

the mother and sister. Of the latter's ignorance he had no doubt — but had he any right to enlighten them? Admitting that Tappington had deceived them with the others, would they thank him for opening their eyes to it? If they had already a suspicion, would they care to know that it was shared by him? Halting between his frankness and his delicacy, the final thought that in his budding relations with the daughter it might seem a cruel bid for her confidence, or a revenge for their distrust of him, inclined him to silence. But an unforeseen occurrence took the matter from his hands. At noon he was told that Mr. Carstone wished to see him in his private room!

Satisfied that his complicity with Dornton's escape was discovered, the unfortunate Herbert presented himself, pale but self-possessed, before his employer. That brief man of business bade him be seated, and standing himself before the fireplace, looked down curiously, but not unkindly, upon his employee.

"Mr. Bly, the bank does not usually interfere with the private affairs of its employees, but for certain reasons which I prefer to explain to you later, I must ask you to give me a straightforward answer to one or two questions. I may say that they have nothing to do with your relations to the bank, which are to us perfectly satisfactory."

More than ever convinced that Mr. Carstone was about to speak of his visitor, Herbert signified his willingness to reply.

"You have been seen a great deal with Miss Brooks lately — on the street and elsewhere — acting as her escort, and evidently on terms of intimacy. To do you both justice, neither of you seemed to have made it a secret or avoided observation; but I must ask you directly if it is with her mother's permission?"

Considerably relieved, but wondering what was coming, Herbert answered, with boyish frankness, that it was.

"Are you — engaged to the young lady?"

"No, sir."

"Are you — well, Mr. Bly — briefly, are you what is called 'in love' with her?" asked the banker, with a certain brusque hurrying over of a sentiment evidently incompatible with their present business surroundings.

Herbert blushed. It was the first time he had heard the question voiced, even by himself.

"I am," he said resolutely.

"And you wish to marry her?"

"If I dared ask her to accept a young man with no position as yet," stammered Herbert.

"People don't usually consider a young man in Carstone's Bank of no position," said the banker dryly; "and I wish for your sake *that* were the only impediment. For I am compelled to reveal to you a secret." He paused, and folding his arms, looked fixedly down upon his clerk. "Mr. Bly, Tappington Brooks, the brother of your sweetheart, was a defaulter and embezzler from this bank!"

Herbert sat dumfounded and motionless.

"Understand two things," continued Mr. Carstone quickly. "First, that no purer or better women exist than Miss Brooks and her mother. Secondly, that they know nothing of this, and that only myself and one other man are in possession of the secret."

He slightly changed his position, and went on more deliberately. "Six weeks ago Tappington sat in that chair where you are sitting now, a convicted hypocrite and thief. Luckily for him, although his guilt was plain, and the whole secret of his double life revealed to me, a sum of money advanced in pity by one of his gambling confederates had made his accounts good and saved him from suspicion in the eyes of his fellow clerks and my partners. At first he tried to fight me on that point; then he blustered and said his mother could have refunded the money; and

asked me what was a paltry five thousand dollars! I told him, Mr. Bly, that it might be five years of his youth in state prison; that it might be five years of sorrow and shame for his mother and sister; that it might be an everlasting stain on the name of his dead father — my friend. He talked of killing himself: I told him he was a cowardly fool. He asked me to give him up to the authorities: I told him I intended to take the law in my own hands and give him another chance; and then he broke down. I transferred him that very day, without giving him time to communicate with anybody, to our branch office at Portland, with a letter explaining his position to our agent, and the injunction that for six months he should be under strict surveillance. I myself undertook to explain his sudden departure to Mrs. Brooks, and obliged him to write to her from time to time." He paused, and then continued: "So far I believe my plan has been successful: the secret has been kept; he has broken with the evil associates that ruined him here — to the best of my knowledge he has had no communication with them since; even a certain woman here who shared his vicious hidden life has abandoned him."

"Are you sure?" asked Herbert involuntarily, as he recalled his mysterious visitor.

"I believe the Vigilance Committee has considered it a public duty to deport her and her confederates beyond the State," returned Carstone dryly.

Another idea flashed upon Herbert. "And the gambler who advanced the money to save Tappington?" he said breathlessly.

"Was n't such a hound as the rest of his kind, if report says true," answered Carstone. "He was well known here as George Dornton — Gentleman George — a man capable of better things. But he was before your time, Mr. Bly — *you* don't know him."

Herbert did n't deem it a felicitous moment to correct his employer, and Mr. Carstone continued: "I have now told you what I thought it was my duty to tell you. I must leave *you* to judge how far it affects your relations with Miss Brooks."

Herbert did not hesitate. "I should be very sorry, sir, to seem to undervalue your consideration or disregard your warning; but I am afraid that even if you had been less merciful to Tappington, and he were now a convicted felon, I should change neither my feelings nor my intentions to his sister."

"And you would still marry her?" said Carstone sternly; "*you*, an employee of the bank, would set the example of allying yourself with one who had robbed it?"

"I — am afraid I would, sir," said Herbert slowly.

"Even if it were a question of your remaining here?" said Carstone grimly.

Poor Herbert already saw himself dismissed and again taking up his weary quest for employment; but, nevertheless, he answered stoutly: —

"Yes, sir."

"And nothing will prevent you marrying Miss Brooks?"

"Nothing — save my inability to support her."

"Then," said Mr. Carstone, with a peculiar light in his eyes, "it only remains for the bank to mark its opinion of your conduct by *increasing your salary to enable you to do so.* Shake hands, Mr. Bly," he said, laughing. "I think you 'll do to tie to — and I believe the young lady will be of the same opinion. But not a word to either her or her mother in regard to what you have heard. And now I may tell you something more. I am not without hope of Tappington's future, nor — d—n it! — without some excuse for his fault, sir. He was artificially brought up. When my old friend died, Mrs. Brooks, still a handsome woman, like all her sex would n't rest until she had

another devotion, and wrapped herself and her children up in the Church. Theology may be all right for grown people, but it 's apt to make children artificial; and Tappington was pious before he was fairly good. He drew on a religious credit before he had a moral capital behind it. He was brought up with no knowledge of the world, and when he went into it — it captured him. I don't say there are not saints born into the world occasionally; but for every one you 'll find a lot of promiscuous human nature. My old friend Josh Brooks had a heap of it, and it would n't be strange if some was left in his children, and burst through their strait-lacing in a queer way. That 's all! Good-morning, Mr. Bly. Forget what I 've told you for six months, and then I should n't wonder if Tappington was on hand to give his sister away."

. . . . . .

Mr. Carstone's prophecy was but half realized. At the end of six months Herbert Bly's discretion and devotion were duly rewarded by Cherry's hand. But Tappington did *not* give her away. That saintly prodigal passed his period of probation with exemplary rectitude, but, either from a dread of old temptation or some unexplained reason, he preferred to remain in Portland, and his fastidious nest on Telegraph Hill knew him no more. The key of the little door on the side street passed, naturally, into the keeping of Mrs. Bly.

Whether the secret of Tappington's double life was ever revealed to the two women is not known to the chronicler. Mrs. Bly is reported to have said that the climate of Oregon was more suited to her brother's delicate constitution than the damp fogs of San Francisco, and that his tastes were always opposed to the mere frivolity of metropolitan society. The only possible reason for supposing that the mother may have become cognizant of her son's youthful errors was in the occasional visits to the house of the hand-

some George Dornton, who, in the social revolution that followed the brief reign of the Vigilance Committee, characteristically returned as a dashing stockbroker, and the fact that Mrs. Brooks seemed to have discarded her ascetic shawl forever. But as all this was contemporaneous with the absurd rumor, that owing to the loneliness induced by the marriage of her daughter she contemplated a similar change in her own condition, it is deemed unworthy the serious consideration of this veracious chronicle.

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